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Polish Pupils in London Schools: opportunities and challenges

PROJECT REPORT

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Introduction

The rapid increase in Polish migration to Britain since 2004 – and with it many children enrolling in British schools – has brought new challenges as well as opportunities. Substantial numbers of Polish people now live in all regions of Britain and they are the most widely spread of all migrant groups (Pollard et al, 2008). Schools across the country are having to respond to these new arrivals and to support them in making a successful transition into education. Many schools in large cities have long experience of supporting children for whom English is not their mother tongue and who arrive with little knowledge of the language. [1] For others – including in rural areas where populations have been more monocultural – this may be a new experience.

Press reports have often been negative, emphasising the difficulties of incorporating large groups of new arrivals. Many schools and education authorities, including those with limited experience of dealing with these issues, have, however, welcomed the opportunities it brings and have responded with positive projects aimed at integrating these new pupils (see for example a project based in Dorset (Tokarz, 2007). [2] Even schools in areas with diverse populations, however, have faced new challenges. Many teachers lack information about the educational experience of these children and the expectations and fears of pupils and their parents. They also need advice about effective strategies to support them in settling in and progressing.

This report was commissioned by **Multiverse** and carried out by a team of researchers at the Social Policy Research Centre at Middlesex University. It aims to respond to the needs of teachers and others responsible for providing education for Polish children and to provide information to teachers and others involved in schools to help them support this group. It focuses particularly on primary school children, the most numerous group of Polish pupils. Much of the report is based on research carried out in London schools during the summer term of 2008. While the experience of London schools is different from those in other parts of Britain, the schools we worked in offered a range of experience and strategies which may be useful in different contexts.

Polish children share many challenges faced by new arrivals from other countries, including both voluntary and forced migrants (see for example a report for the Refugee Council, Doyle and McCorriston, 2008). They bring, however, specific issues related to the migration strategies of their parents, the different educational system in Poland and the expectations of parents. This can lead to misunderstandings between parents and schools and to frustration and disappointment. The nature of their migration also means that Polish children often have little preparation for English education and this can mean that their transition into British schools may be difficult. Polish children are generally perceived – by both their parents and teachers - as achieving well within British schools. While this is broadly true, our research suggests that the

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[1] In parts of Wales, Welsh is the first language spoken by children. We recognise the additional issues which may be faced in this situation but this is beyond the scope of the current project.

[2] See also http://www.cheshire.gov.uk/childrenandfamilies/CIS/Parents/

http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/sharingpractice/s/polishpupils.asp

actual picture is more complex. Many children face significant emotional as well as practical difficulties on arrival and some may need considerable support over an extended period to enable them to settle.

The report begins by discussing the scope of our own study and the sources used. We then provide some background to the new Polish migration, highlighting some of the specific challenges which this group can present. We include information about the educational system in Poland since showing the differences from the British system, and the different expectations of parents about schooling, may help overcome some of the misunderstandings of both teachers and parents. We then move to a more detailed discussion of the response of the schools in the study. We highlight the challenges and opportunities which Polish migration has brought and the areas of tensions and differing perceptions between parents and teachers. We then discuss strategies which have been implemented to support them at national, local authority, school and individual classroom level. Drawing on our research we outline some key conclusions and recommendations for teachers, policy makers and local authorities. The appendices include a more detailed discussion of the characteristics of the Polish population in Britain and of the numbers of Polish children in London.

The scope of the study

This research built on a study of recent Polish migrants to London by members of the research team (Ryan et al, 2007; Ryan et al, 2008). This highlighted changing patterns of migration and family settlement which have implications for schooling. On-going research by Lopez Rodriguez on parental perceptions of education also provided valuable background information (Lopez Rodriguez, forthcoming). The current study involved three main data sources:

a) A review of available material on the context of Polish migration and educational issues, including academic studies, reports by education authorities and other bodies. While there is a substantial literature on recent Polish migration, there has been no major study of the implications for schooling and much of the available data is highly localised.
b) Statistical data on Polish pupils in British and London schools. The availability of this data is highly uneven across different education authorities; in particular, language statistics are not available for all local authorities.
c) Fieldwork including interviews with staff in four London primary schools with a range of structure, experience of diversity, local authority support and numbers of Polish pupils; and with parents of children attending primary schools.

The context - Polish migration to Britain

The entry of Poland and other countries from Eastern Europe into the EU in 2004 brought a substantial, and largely unplanned, expansion of migration to Britain. Polish people were the largest group of these migrants, over half of the total between 2004 and 2008 (Home Office, 2008). While they were encouraged to enter the labour force, little was done to provide for their needs or those of their families. Thousands of Polish children have entered British schools, often with little knowledge of English or of the environment into which they have been thrust.

Contemporary migration represents the largest and fastest growing increase in the population from Poland in Britain but is by no means the first. Britain has experienced several very different waves of migration from Poland since the Second World War. In the immediate aftermath, 200,000 stateless Poles were granted settlement in Britain (Paul, 1997). They included veterans from the Polish Army in Exile which was based in London and Displaced Persons who had fled war zones. Others left Poland with the formation of the post-war state, and were joined by a continuing trickle of émigrés during subsequent decades, who were generally welcomed officially as 'refugees from Communism'.

This community was spread throughout Britain and although there were concentrations in the industrial North and Midlands as well as London, many settled in small towns and rural areas. This group were predominantly Catholic and identified strongly with Polish nationalist ideology (Duvell, 2004). While they broadly integrated into British society, they retained a Polish identity with a network of community organisations and businesses. There are now 113 Polish community Centres and 67 Polish Saturday schools across Britain.[3] The Polish Church in Britain has a separate hierarchy, answerable to the Church in Poland and there are 82 Polish Catholic Parishes.

With the declaration of Martial Law in 1981 following the struggles led by **Solidarity**, thousands fled Poland and some people already temporarily in Britain decided to prolong their stay. This group, a large proportion of whom were intellectuals, become known as the 'Solidarity Generation' and many claimed political asylum.

The end of the Cold War and the opening of the border to the West after 1989 brought a third, and very different, form of migration as people were now not only free to leave but 'free to leave and to come back' (Morokvasic, 2004: 7) so migration no longer necessitated permanent exile. Poles formed the majority of this 'post wall' migration as emigration was stimulated by unemployment following transition to the market (Hardy and Clark, 2005). Cheap airlines opened up new routes from Polish cities, while others relied on the expanding coach services to London's Victoria Station.

Migration was often aimed at improving or maintaining income and quality of life at home rather than permanent settlement. Indeed, mobility was often viewed as an alternative to emigration (Morokvasic, 2004:11). Unlike previous flows, migration was predominantly temporary and they had little social involvement with previous generations of Polish migrants or with British society. Jordan suggested that they developed 'only an instrumental accommodation to the host society, and few claims upon its social provision or public infrastructure' (Jordan: 2002:3). Legal access to work in Britain before EU Accession was through individual work permits or sector-based

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[3] Information from Zjednoczenie Polskie w Wielkiej Brytanii założone, Federation of Federation of Poles in Great Britain www. http://www.zpwb.org.uk

schemes for temporary unskilled work. The process for obtaining work permits was long and cumbersome until reforms in 2000 (Flynn, 2005) and most Polish workers chose informal routes outside these bureaucratic structures. An EU agreement with Associate Members in 1993 allowed Polish citizens to open businesses in Britain. Garapich (2005: 9) estimates that 'tens of thousands' of Poles obtained permits for self-employment often based on 'fictitious' businesses. Polish people without formal permission for work generally entered on tourist visas and often returned frequently to renew them (Jordan, 2002).

Because of their undocumented status, there are no reliable statistics, but Home Office officials estimated that they were the third largest group of illegal entrants during the 1990s (Duvell, 2004:4). The majority were male (Kepinska, 2004), and predominantly young and single (Duvell, 2004; Jordan, 2002). In spite of this new migration, according to census figures the total number of people born in Poland living in Britain declined from 73,738 in 1991 to 58,106 in 2001, of whom 22,224 lived in London.

The situation turned around dramatically in 2004. Britain's policy towards the new accession countries, which differed from those of most other EU states, reflected its dependence on migrant labour. A speech by Immigration Minister Barbara Roche in 2000 had signalled a major policy change, towards 'managed migration' in which the immigration of certain groups of workers is encouraged to meet the needs of the British economy (Flynn, 2005). Labour shortages are especially acute in unskilled work such as agriculture and processing and in the caring professions particularly in London (Raghuram and Kofman, 2002). The *Five Year Strategy for asylum and immigration* (Home Office, 2005: 5) envisaged that workers from the Accession states would replace unskilled immigrants from outside Europe. Migration from Poland has also increasingly filled shortages in professional occupations such as nursing and dentistry (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2007).

In spite of the drive to recruit labour from these countries, no policies were put in place to support these new migrants who were left to make their own arrangements for accommodation and other services. They were dependent on the agents who had recruited them or informal networks of family and friends. They received little support from established Polish community networks since the clubs and other institutions were aimed at an older generation although some have attempted to respond to the new migrants. There are profound divisions between these different waves of migrants. Whereas for earlier generations migration was political and often involuntary, for more recent generations it is mainly economic and involves pursuing individual opportunities. The earlier generations were exiles who saw themselves as having no possibility of return under the communist regime, forced to settle in Britain while retaining an intense attachment to Poland. Those who leave voluntarily may be seen as betraying their Polishness. Older Polish migrants – and indeed newer migrants – also criticise the behaviour of newcomers, complaining that they are loud and often rude in public (Ryan *et. al.*, 2007).

New migration has brought a massive expansion in the attendance at Polish, and other Catholic, churches but the links between generations have remained limited. As one parish priest explained:

> *We can talk about unity under the roof of the Church, where people gather and pray together .... But outside one can't talk about unity. Rather, the old Polonia discretely but firmly separate themselves from the new emigrants and the Solidarity generation is already in a different social position from the new emigrants.* [4]

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[4] Quoted in Ryan et al., 2007.

Thus new migrants have been unable to draw on the experience and knowledge of earlier generations of Poles. They often arrive with very little information about British society and the education system and with limited knowledge of the language.

Current migration from Poland

Estimates of the numbers of Polish people living in Britain are notoriously unreliable, an issue which is discussed further in Appendix 1. The often temporary nature of migration means that it is difficult to gain an accurate picture of the number actually in Britain and many Polish migrants are uncertain about their long term plans.

EU accession has had complex implications for the strategies and aspirations of Polish migrants. On the one hand, by opening up legal access to the labour market in Britain, it allow people to come and go freely, facilitating temporary – and often multiple – stays, or 'commuter migration' (Morokvasic, 2004). On the other hand, EU citizenship and the rights attached to it promote a sense of belonging and may encourage more permanent stay. The research evidence suggests that a variety of strategies are developing, often involving complex family structures spread between Poland and Britain. A large scale survey in 2006 suggested that a substantial proportion planned long term or indefinite stays (CRONEM, 2006). More recent research for the Institute of Public Policy Research (Ippr) suggests that return migration is increasing as the Polish economy has improved, but substantial numbers plan to remain long term and new migrants continue to arrive (Pollard *et. al.*, 2008). Fihel, *el al.* (2006) point to the temporariness of much contemporary Polish migration but others suggest that this has moved onto a new phase with family reunion developing as family members join men who had initially migrated alone (Lopez Rodriguez, 2006).

Qualitative research with people who had migrated immediately before or after EU accession suggested that complex family strategies are developing, often involving long term or permanent settlement, in which both men and women may be the primary migrant (Ryan et al, 2008a). As stay is prolonged, schooling becomes increasingly important. Indeed children's education may become a key factor in deciding whether to stay or return since parents do not want to disrupt them once they have started within a particular system (Ryan et al, 2009).

The specific characteristics of Polish migration have important implications for the experience of children entering British schools and the challenges they face in settling in. We summarise these briefly below and will return to them in our discussion of the experiences of schools.

Key Features of Polish Migration

1. The speed of new migration
New legal rights have brought a rapid rise in migration over a short time. The number of Polish children in some schools has risen from zero to several dozen over a period of two to three years. As migration has become a normal part of life for Polish people, they may make little preparation for the move. They often lack familiarity with the English language and the British educational s**ystem so children may be placed into an unfamiliar environment which they, and their parents, find hard to understand in the early stages.**

2. Temporary and circular migration

Temporary migration means that many retain a stake in Polish society and the option of return. This can reduce motivation to learn English and to integrate in Britain. Many use services in both countries, for example returning to Poland in order to consult a doctor. They rely on Polish networks, of family and friends, often of returned migrants, for information and support, and have limited links with mainstream British society. Lack of involvement with previous generations of migrants also reduces the available support structures.

3. EU status

EU Accession gave them new rights as EU citizens. Although citizens from the new accession countries were granted more limited rights during the transition period towards full membership, they nevertheless gained a new sense of entitlement in Britain and high expectations of services, including schools.

4. Lack of familiarity with diversity and multiculturalism

Migration may be perceived as moving from an ethnically and religiously homogeneous society to one with a diverse population in ethnic, national, cultural, religious terms. Polish national identity has been constructed around identification with Catholicism and a myth of homogeneity, a myth which belies the diversity of its history. Contemporary Polish society is predominantly white with 98% of the population ethnic Poles. The Jewish population, once the largest in Europe, has been virtually eliminated, its decline a result not only of the holocaust but of anti-semitism in the post-war period (Gross, 2006). Racism against the Roma population has been widely reported (ERRC, 2002). This lack of acknowledgement of the diversity of Polish society means that many children arriving in Britain have limited experience of dealing with other cultural or religious groups. This can be a source of misunderstanding and may give rise to xenophobic behaviour from parents and children (Majuk, 2007).

5. Economic situation

Concentration in low status employment (see Appendix 1) with high levels of deskilling, long hours, shift work and insecure contracts, all impact on the ability of parents to become involved in their children's education. It may also mean that they are in poor accommodation with little space for children to study.

6. Geographical dispersion

Concentration in sectors such as agriculture and services means that, unlike other non-UK nationals, they are geographically widely dispersed. Many schools have had to deal with English as an Additional Language for the first time. Lack of diversity in these areas may mean Polish pupils are more visible as 'foreign' and may be subject to racial abuse (Majuk, 2007) while schools have little experience in dealing with this problem.

The Polish school system [5]

Education in Poland is compulsory between the ages of 7 and 18. From the age of 16 this can be in work based schemes. From September 2010 children will start school at age 6.

Legislation in 1999 (*Ustawa o systemie o sweaty,* Reform of the Education System) introduced a new structure of schooling which included a middle school (Gymnasium) for those aged 13-16 and changes to the secondary system. The main types of schooling are:

- Pre-school provision (non-compulsory) up to age 7 (now 6)
- Reception class (starting at age 6)
- Primary school (ages 7- 13)
- *Gymnasium* (lower secondary) (13-16)
- Post-gymnasium schools (further education)
  - Lyceum (*Liceum Ogolnoksztalcace*) (general or specialized) (16-19)
  - Technical secondary school (*Technikum*) (16 – 20)
  - Vocational school (*Zasadnicza Szkola Zawodowa*) (16-18 or 16-19)

Primary school education is divided into two stages and follows a common centralized curriculum:
- Stage I – Years 1-3 ('integrated teaching') aimed at ensuring transition between pre-school and school education.
- Stage II – Years 4-6 timetabled subjects: Polish, history and civics, modern foreign language, mathematics, natural science, music, art, technology, computer sciences, PE, religion or ethics. Other subjects are taught within the curriculum: health, ecological and media education, education for society, family life, cultural heritage and civic education. Classes are taught by subject teachers.

Some primary schools are 'integrated schools' where children with special needs are taught alongside other pupils. The pupil teacher ratio is lower, with support teachers assisting in the classroom.

The **gymnasium** provides education on a wide range of subjects at basic level with the aim of helping individuals identify their interests and make choices about future education.

Post gymnasium schools provide a range of academic and vocational courses. Graduates of lyceum and technical secondary school receive a diploma (Matura) providing entry to higher education. Graduates of vocational courses may enter further educational classes in vocational courses, including teaching.

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[5] Source: Polish Government Information Service: www.buwiwm.edu.pl
See also http://www.qca.org.uk/libraryAssets/media/qca-05-1760-11334_poland.pdf

Figure 3 – The Education System in Poland
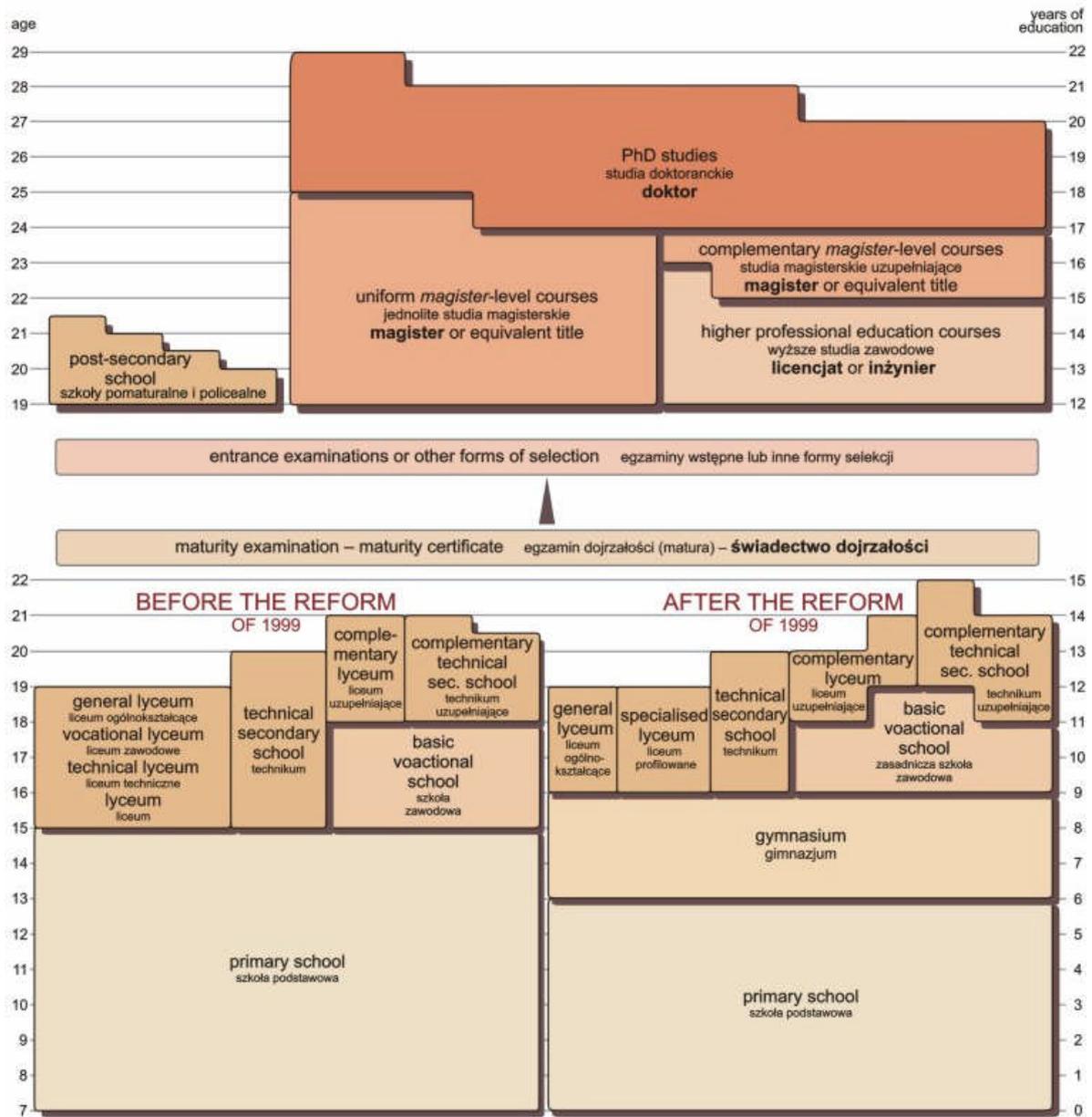
Scheme elaborated for the Bureau for Academic Recognition and International Exchange, June 2002

Differences from the British system

There are considerable differences between Britain and Poland in relation to the structure and organisation of schooling. We outline some key features of the Polish education system and highlight differences from the British system which may help explain differences in expectations. The Polish system has changed considerably in recent years, but parents with children in school now will compare British education to the system through which they went.

A centralised system
The Polish state education system is more uniform and centralised than the British system, with less autonomy for individual schools in relation to the curriculum and resources used. Competition for pupils is less intense than in Britain although this is increasing partly as a result of low birth rates in Poland. The Catholic Church has its own schools but these make up only a small fraction of all schools. Private schools were banned until 1989 but since then a private system has grown rapidly with private schools regarded as relatively affordable.

Choosing schools
Most children attend their local school and there is less emphasis on 'choice'. The admissions procedure is thus less complex than in the UK. There is, however, growing emphasis on ranking, league tables and examination results so that parents tend to shop around and parents also seek schools whose timetables fit in with their work commitments.

Age of starting school
Children start school later than in Britain (at age 6) which means that younger Polish children entering British schools may have no previous educational experience. Their parents may be unaware of the age when children should start and thus there may be a delay in enrolling children.

The school day
Schools start at 8am but children may start later depending on their timetable. They usually have between 5 and 7 45-minute sessions divided by breaks

The Curriculum
All children are expected to fulfill the same objectives and reach similar levels; work sheets are not differentiated and there is no streaming according to ability. Foreign language, now generally English, is compulsory from Year 4. Many schools have introduced languages from an earlier stage.

Assessment
Children receive a certificate of completion each year. In Stage I this is accompanied by descriptive reports and in Stage II primary and gymnasium by grades for each subject. Grades are from 1 to 6 where 6 is outstanding and 1 unsatisfactory. There is no official testing between Stage I and Stage II but pupils have frequent tests administered by subject teachers to monitor their progress.
At the end of primary school children take an official test, leading to a certificate of completion whose results determine whether they go on to more academic lyceums or vocational schools.

Homework
Children are expected to do homework daily in each subject from Year 4 (aged 9) bringing exercise books home. They have a detailed homework timetable which facilitates parental supervision of their children's homework and general progress.

Extracurricular activities

After-school classes and clubs (*swietlica*) are available in all primary schools and are popular with younger pupils. These can involve special interests (e.g. photography or music) or be related to school subjects. Children who are behind in their learning are offered booster classes.

Uniforms
An overall worn over casual clothes was introduced in 2007 but this has been adopted only in certain schools. There is no strict dress code

Discipline
Discipline is more heavily emphasised in Polish schools than in British schools.

Parental involvement
Parental *engagement in their children's learning* is more emphasized in Poland than *involvement in school life*. The homework system and centralised curriculum provides parents with detailed knowledge of the curriculum and of their children's progress. Parents are able to monitor homework and their children's progress and to help eliminate 'potential gaps in knowledge acquisition' (Lopez Rodriguez, 2005). Parents bring these expectations of control to English education which can be a major source of frustration.
Parental involvement in the overall life of the school is less encouraged in Polish schools.

Education has been perceived as crucial in facilitating social mobility both in Poland and perhaps even more for those who emigrate. Research on educational attainment during the transition to the market economy in Poland (Beblo and Lauer, 2004) showed that household income had an insignificant impact on children's educational prospects. Sword (1996), writing of Polish migrants in the UK, notes that they put a major emphasis on the educational achievement of their children and suggests they project their ambitions onto their children for the careers they themselves have lost. Recent research in Britain found a similar attitude, with Polish people seeing their class position in terms of the opportunities that lay ahead rather than current occupational or economic position (Eade *et al*, 2007).

The transition to the market economy in Poland opened up opportunities for the pursuit of wealth and promoted individualism. Some Polish parents bring highly individualistic attitudes to their children's educational attainment and a determination to promote their success through close scrutiny of their progress. At the same time, partly as a legacy of the Communist regime, they have high expectations that the state system will provide the means for their children's success.

The Schools in the study

There are considerable problems in estimating the number of Polish pupils in schools in London. Appendix 2 discusses this issue and provides estimates based on the available data of the number of Polish children in the four boroughs in which the schools in the study are located. Contact with these schools was established through previous research or personal contact. The schools were:

- Catholic Junior JMI (450 pupils) with 60 Polish pupil in an inner London borough
- Catholic JMI (440) pupils with 15 Polish pupils in an inner London borough
- County Junior school (350 pupils) in an outer London borough with 31 Polish pupils
- County JMI (400 pupils) in an inner London Borough with 10 Polish pupils

The schools thus covered a range of structure and experience of Polish pupils. They were each in a different borough and there appeared to be significant differences in the extent of local authority support for children with English as an Additional Language (EAL). Only in one school, where we also interviewed members of the borough's Ethnic Minority Achievement (EMA) team, did teachers mention this as a significant resource.

Interviews were conducted with:
- Classroom teachers (5)
- Headteacher (1) and deputy head (2)
- Nursery teacher (1)
- Polish speaking Teaching Assistant (2)
- Schools EMAG coordinator (3)
- Welfare officer (1)
- Officers from one local authority EMA team (2)

The interviews covered a range of topics which varied depending on the role of the interviewee. They included school/local authority practices; challenges and opportunities presented by Polish pupils; classroom practices and strategies; resources used; and their views about resources and support needed. All were promised anonymity (both of the school and individuals interviewed) and were offered a copy of the report and a feedback session with staff. In the quotations below, they are referred to by their role and not by their school. The exception is the Tower Hamlets EMA team, where attempting to disguise the name of the borough would have prevented us from referring to initiatives which are in the public domain through for example their website.

Interviews with parents
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 parents of Polish pupils, ten mothers and one father. They were contacted through a variety of routes including the schools in the study. All were promised anonymity and their names have been changed. Topics included their perceptions of their children's progress; their views of the school and issues concerning communication; the support their children received; and suggestions for improvement.

Interviews with school staff were conducted in English, except in the case of two interviews with Polish Teaching Assistants which were conducted in Polish. All interviews with parents except one were conducted in Polish, fully translated and transcribed.

We did not seek to compare the responses of parents and staff in the same school since this could have raised issues concerning anonymity and confidentiality. More importantly, we were

not seeking to make judgements on the schools which participated in the research, but to share the good practice and ideas which they provided as well as identify challenges.

We cannot claim that our interviewees are representative of the situation in London as a whole. Fieldwork in schools provided a snapshot of the situation and the responses of staff. They nevertheless provide a rich source of information about the opportunities and challenges faced and strategies which have been effective in responding to these. Similarly, the parents interviewed may not be representative of Polish parents as a whole but several themes appeared consistently in many interviews. Some of these have been discussed in the literature but the interviews also raised a number of important issues which have not been widely acknowledged and which have implications for the progress of Polish children in British schools.

The experience of schooling

Migration strategies and their implications for school experience

The particular features of recent Polish migration discussed above have implications for how children are able to settle in school. Several of these issues were raised during interviews.

The arrival of new children

Several teachers referred to the speed of growth of migration. As one put it

> *There are definitely a lot more in the past 2 years. We obviously had some before then, but the last two years there are a lot more. Some schools have a lot more than us and some schools in [the borough] have not had it before and have suddenly been hit. There is a lot of panic.*

This 'panic' is particularly acute if children arrive mid-year, making it difficult for child and their teachers to adjust. As this teacher went on to say:

> *We've had six join the year group with no English since September ... We have a new Polish girl who will be joining my class tomorrow. She has literally just come from Poland and speaks no English.*

She went on to spell out some of the problems:

> *It sounds dreadful, but I always dread a new child arriving, it's like going right back to the beginning again. And getting them to access the lesson is difficult particularly at this time of the year because they have missed so much.*

The need to accommodate to new arrivals can conflict with other priorities. Schools are increasingly judged on the results of tests, both internally administered SATS and public examinations. Those with limited English need time before they are able to achieve highly on these tests and this has implications for the school's overall performance. As one headteacher put it:

> *While some of them may have achieved level 4 in maths if someone translates, they definitely wouldn't in English and we have to enter them for all three[subjects] and that affects our overall results.*

The increasingly time-consuming drive to improve SATs results can make it difficult to devote the time and resources necessary to ensure that new arrivals learn. This can mean that their needs are neglected as this deputy head explained:

> *From January in year 6 we are just doing revision for the SATs. It is all a very fast pace, and if they are not keeping up with it, it is incredibly difficult.*

Lack of preparation for the move

A related issue is that both parents and their children often arrive in the UK with very limited knowledge of English and of the system. Their plans often do not involve a positive decision to settle in Britain but, at least at first, to make enough money to build a better life in Poland. As one parent put it, it was *'a pure economic decision – there were no prospects on Poland to get a good job* or as

another asked despairingly *'what is in Poland?'* Some mothers arrived unwillingly, following husbands who had migrated alone, as Sylwia said:

> *I did not want to come here but my son missed his dad terribly and I could not imagine this 'relationship at a distance' because when my husband came here he did not want to go back.*

They may not be aware of the age when children start school in Britain or of the process for choosing and enrolling in school. As Jolanta explained:

> *My husband came here one year earlier and he was not into schools, into education… he did not realise that children go to school so early here*

In the early stages, parents may be unsettled, finding their own way in an unfamiliar society and have little time to focus on their children's schooling. As a teacher explained:

> *We have mostly economic migration… these are people who work in hotels, restaurants, laundries, they come with families and you know – they are really into the economic benefits rather than the education of their children. At that stage this group is still trying to settle here as families and then perhaps they will focus on education; children ['s education] will 'come' later.*

The fact that many come before they have found work means that they may move around initially as they search for employment. This can mean moving schools and disrupt children's education. As one teacher explained:

> *We have a mobile population here. They settle but temporarily until they find a proper job or proper home, and then they move on…. you get them on the brink of doing well and they either go back home or go to another school and the whole process starts again.*

Although parents were often unprepared for the difficulties faced by their children in the transition into schooling, children's education is often a major factor in the decision about whether to stay. A teacher suggested that *'once the child has settled and is getting on, their commitment is to stay here'.* Ewa spoke of her reluctance to disrupt her children again by moving back to Poland:

> *We already brought children here once, we changed their environment and I would not like to do it again.*

Continuing commitment to Poland

Polish people may expect to return to Poland in the near future and therefore be less willing to accept the norms of British schooling. A particular problem noted in our study, as well as in a report for Lincoln schools (Lincoln education authority, 2007) was school attendance. Schools are increasingly monitored and judged on the attendance record of the children, an issue which is unfamiliar in Poland. As a welfare office, responsible for attendance explained, *'attendance is a big thing here but it's not such a big thing in Poland'.* Many take extended holidays in Poland and *'tack on extra days to the half term or go early at the end of the year'.* As well as wanting to spent longer periods in Poland, it is much cheaper than travelling at peak times. This issue can become a source of tension with parents.

Some attempt to keep the options open for children to enter or re-enter the Polish educational system. This may involve taking examinations in Poland to allow them to progress through the system. This again means missing school in Britain and can reduce their commitment to

progressing within the British system. These issues can cause misunderstandings between parents and the school. As the welfare officer explained:

> *I had one parent came in last week and he said his daughter was in Poland doing her exams. I did not understand what that meant, but he said it was very important for her to do these exams for her school.*

The Response of Teachers

The overall response of teachers to Polish children was positive. Many felt that they brought an extra dimension to the classroom, contributing to its diversity. The following comments are typical:

> *These children enrich the curriculum and the life of the school.*

> *It is a good opportunity for children in the classroom to get to know children from Eastern Europe.*

> *We just had European day a couple of weeks ago and every year group picked a country and year 4 picked Poland.*

There was a perception that they achieved highly, especially in maths, as one class teacher described:

> *I always find that Polish children pick up numeracy a lot quicker. They are a very nice addition to the class.*

Several spoke of the strong work ethic of children and their parents. One class teacher compared Polish children to those born in London:

> *One thing that surprises me about these children is their work ethic, they are aware that they don't speak English very well and they want to learn. So they are the children that will listen intently to what you say ... They will always do their homework and their attendance is very good.... because they listen to what you want them to do, their work often comes out better than an English speaking child who was born and raised here.*

The head teacher of another school talked of the parents:

> *Polish families have a tremendous work ethic and they manage to transmit to the children, that if you learn English, you work hard, you will do well. They support them in doing their homework.*

One teacher, whose parents came to London during the way, compared the current generation with those of her parents:

> *When my parents came here during the war they had lost loads of opportunities in their education so education was very important. Perhaps it is the same now; I know that the Polish parents who come here are very keen and very supportive. They do everything to support their child and the children seem eager and want to learn.*

The group faced, however, a number of challenges and these could be more long term than is generally thought. In addition, there was often a mismatch between parental expectations and what the school provided. Sometimes this was due to practical difficulties such as lack of

information and language but in other cases they were more deep rooted, related to different ideas about the relationship between parents and schools.

Starting School: children's initial reactions and experiences

> **When B first came he was really scared. He was really very frightened and I was worried. He had been traumatised by coming here and he didn't really understand why. So it was a bit of a shock. Everything in another language and he was separated from their community and friends and they are separated from their parents here with us.**
> **(Class teacher)**

We did not interview children, but all the teachers and many of the parents spoke about the children's initial reactions to arriving in school. Children starting school in an unfamiliar environment face both practical and emotional challenges as 'B' did. They may not be able to communicate with anyone around them and may not understand what they are expected to do. Those who have just arrived in the country have lost all their familiar reference points; their family situation may have changed, they will have lost friends, the extended family and their home. The experience can be traumatic for some children as another teacher explained:

> *Some of them have literally just arrived in the country two days before and it must be a massive culture shock. Panic, I don't know what's going on!*

Clearly, they will need time to adjust to the new environment as well as to the language. As one EMA coordinator said:

> *Some children just sit there, they don't speak, they're just processing it. So it could be some time. There is nothing wrong with them but that's the way they are settling in. Just observing and processing it.*

Younger Polish children face particular difficulties because of the later age of starting school in Poland. They may therefore arrive in Year 3 in a London school with no experience of schooling. As a teacher explained:

> *With 'O' it was very difficult. He didn't have any skills, he couldn't write. He was 7 or 8 when he came. He was probably one of the younger ones in his class, but he was in Year 3, the juniors. He had not been to school in Poland. ... [he] is disaffected by the whole idea of school, [thinking] why should I come here, what am I doing here? But with a lot of intervention he is now ready for school.*

Another explained that older children may face other pressures with the need to prepare for tests.

> *For children who arrive in years 5 and 6 the challenge is to get them into the curriculum as quickly as possible so that when they go to secondary school they are ready.*

Several parents recalled this period of transition into school. Suzanna said '*the first three months was a nightmare'*. Few, however, appeared to have been prepared in advance. Marta described teaching her child the word for toilet:

> *This was the thing that we were trying hard to teach him so he would not have an accident because it would be a shame on him.*

She went on to say, however that for *'the rest we thought somehow he will get on…'* The expectation appeared to be that schools would teach the children English and follow through this process of settling in.

The induction process can be easier if staff are aware of the background from which children have come. Several we interviewed, for example, did not know about the starting age for school in Poland and of other issues which might have a bearing on how children can behave. In some cases children can exploit this ignorance. One teacher described how N refused to conform and would *'get very cross. He would say 'I miss my school in Poland. We could take toys into school, we didn't have to wear school uniform we could do this, we could do that.'* She spoke to some of the parents and other Polish children and discovered that it was not true. Becoming more aware of the actual situation in Polish schools enabled staff to appreciate the level of N's frustration and to develop strategies to help him overcome his sense of loss.

Polish children's experience of ethnic diversity

Several teachers referred to Polish children's lack of familiarity with dealing with diversity. A headteacher suggested that:

> *Some of the Polish children, haven't had the benefit of a multicultural education that the children who have been here since they started school have had. So we find sometimes racist comments being made. So we have to deal with that. … We mustn't blame them for something that is outside their experience and they are saying things that they have heard in Poland.*

One of the Polish TAs reported that she had had to speak to children who made remarks such as *'I do not like him because he is black'*. She felt however that the problem was the parents' attitude. As a Polish speaker she heard how people sometimes spoke about others and felt that it influenced the child's attitude. While parents generally did not express overtly racist attitudes in the interviews, several referred to 'black people' or 'people with scarves' when talking about incidents when they felt that their children had been bullied or had got into conflicts. These remarks suggest that particular groups such as black people or Muslims may be viewed with suspicion by some Polish parents.

These attitudes reflect the lack of acknowledgement of diversity within Poland. This is a two-fold problem: on the one hand, Poland is seen as homogeneous. The Polish TA quoted above, for example, remarked that *'in Poland there are no people from other ethnic groups'*. On the other hand, those seen as 'outsiders' in Poland, such as the Roma, experience significant racism.

Most teachers reported that these attitudes tended to be relatively short lived and that if the problem was tackled early children soon became comfortable in a multicultural environment. An important element in this was the valuing of their own language and culture within the school. Another important element is the increasing recognition within Poland of the diversity of its own history (see for example Schwarz, 2005).

Starting to speak English

> ***G came into the class last year. He had been in the British education system since the age of 5 but was not speaking English. The last school he had been in he had hidden amongst other children. It hadn't been picked up or noticed. He came into our class and stood out like a sore thumb because his attitude was totally different to the other children. He wasn't prepared to speak and I thought for the first two months that he had come straight from Poland, I didn't realise he had spent all that time in the British education system; he should have been speaking fluently at that point. He had a real thing about not wanting to learn English, he talked about wanting to go back to Poland.***
> **(Class teacher)**

Learning the language is clearly a key priority since without it children cannot access the curriculum. The process of learning is, however, complex and may take longer than parents and teachers expect. It may be particularly difficult for younger children who have to learn everything at once: language, skills and content. In G's case, as his class teacher describes, these problems had been particularly protracted since they had not been acknowledged when he first started school.

The initial shock of coming to a new environment can mean it takes time to gain the confidence to start speaking in English. Some may feel able to communicate in other ways, using their own language or body language to signal how they are feeling, but some children need time to adjust. It takes time before children gain the confidence to start speaking in English. As Ewa said of her daughter:

> *For the first two to three months 'U' did not want to say a word in English, when I spoke to her in English she would not talk to me, she was so reluctant to speak English.*

She described her own realisation of the emotional difficulties that U was going through initially.

> *They say that for the first three months one absorbs the language and only later starts speaking. So she was absorbing and I had this impression that she was understanding but it was some sort of mental block , she was completely cutting herself off and did not understand the basic expressions that were spoken to her but then later she opened up and started to talk and talk.*

Some parents, however, were impatient with their children's progress, expecting that they would pick up English quickly. Anna said:

> *I heard that after a year children of their age, they already speak English fluently, well at least they can communicate well in English. I don't know exactly how it looks for 'I' because he certainly speaks with children in English but he never shows it at home.*

A common assumption is that younger children learn language faster. However, as one EMAG coordinator suggested, that may be mistaken and they need support in order to progress.

> *They used to think that children would just assimilate. Well they do, but it doesn't work for everyone and you can accelerate it by just making them feel more included when they come. ..*

Younger children do not have the conceptual framework which would allow them to translate from their own language as older children do and they frequently have to learn language at the same time as basic skills. As an EMAG coordinator explained:

> *Lower down it doesn't work like that; you have to teach them how to write so it's a much slower process..... And it would take them around 2 and a half to 3 years to get to their equivalent peer group level. If they came in with no English it would take them 5-7 years.*

Some children may resist learning English at first. This reluctance may be the result of unhappiness at being in Britain as in G's case. Refusal to learn can also be a form of resistance. H became passive, refusing to learn and relying on Polish speakers. One of his teachers said:

> *H used to say 'I am Polish, I don't know what to do', not to me but to the teaching assistant. I thought that was a bit cheeky really. He used to just sit there and wait.*

Another teacher described E, who was more active in his refusal to cooperate, antagonising other children.

> *I think he did not want to come here. He is very defiant... he is not very much liked in the class, he is pretty hostile to other children, though I noticed that he understands more now even if he does not reveal it.*

'A' was receiving mixed messages from home about learning English, which appeared to reflect parental disagreements about whether to remain in England. This contributed to her unwillingness to speak English as her teacher explained.

> *A started at the end of Year 5, and was very reluctant to speak English, she didn't want to. I spoke to her about it, she was struggling with English anyway, but I think her dad didn't want to learn English; there is a resistance at home as well... Her mum speaks fluent English and would encourage A. When the mum came to parents evening, I said I was concerned about A that she was not going to get her level 4 because she is not accessing the curriculum because she is not accessing the language. There was a stubbornness about it. So I said to the mum "do you speak any English at home ever" and that was not happening.*

For A and G it was the desire to communicate with other children which encouraged them to start speaking English. In A's case the class went on an outward bound week where she was with English speakers the whole time as her teacher explained:

> *A had to speak English 24/7 and it had the biggest and best impact on her. She went from being an under-achiever a low level 3 to almost level 5, that is a two level jump, that is bigger and better than expected. Her attitude changed, and she felt more confident and her personality came out more then.*

G was given a lot of encouragement and it took him a very long time to open up, but it was an incident during lunch time which finally prompted him to start speaking

> *He was teased by a couple of children who asked him at lunch time "do you like this or do you like that" he didn't understand the question and gave the wrong answer – and the situation was dealt with, but from that point on it became really important to him, he had a purpose to learn English.*

The presence of other Polish speakers (teachers or other children) can mean that children do not see the point of speaking English and will insist on speaking Polish. Others, however, may avoid speaking Polish and concentrate on learning English. ' O' came to school with no English but, even though she had the support of a Polish teaching assistant, attempted to speak English from

the beginning. As the TA describes, 'O' only spoke to her in Polish when she felt secure in her English:

> *She always tried to speak English to me. I think it was great. Now it happens that, maybe because she already feels comfortable with English, she switches to Polish. Sometimes she speaks Polish to me now.... When she was really struggling then her Polish would be helpful but she never was resorting to it because it was comfortable.*

These experiences point to the complex processes involved in the integrating Polish children into British schools. In the next section we explore in more detail the different strategies that the schools adopted.

Strategies to integrate Polish children

Schools employ a range of strategies to integrate Polish children into the school and the classroom. These may be flexible as, for example, withdrawal of small groups for intensive support is followed by strategies to integrate them into the classroom or these may happen alongside each other. Teachers must balance a number of different and sometimes competing goals: they need to get children integrated into the classroom in order to access the curriculum and to feel included in the class but at the same time acquiring language may be a priority, without which children can make no sense of what is happening in the classroom. Strategies which can combine curriculum and language learning are clearly crucial. They also need to balance an emphasis on learning English with using Polish speaking children or staff to support learning. For classroom teachers there may be tensions and conflicting priorities between supporting new arrivals and the needs of the other children in the class who may have a variety of learning difficulties. This tension is exacerbated by the pressures they are subject to from the culture of testing and monitoring.

In spite of these difficulties, many teachers in the schools in the study were developing and using innovative and effective strategies which appeared to be successful in supporting Polish children. In some schools this was based on whole school policies, while in others they appeared to be left to individual teachers with less sharing of practice.

Specialist EMA Teams

One school was working very closely with the local authority, Tower Hamlets, to develop a coordinated strategy of language acquisition, induction and integration. The school had established a dedicated Ethnic Minority Achievement (EMA) team working within a specialist unit. It is headed by an EMA coordinator who is a qualified teacher as well as holding an ESOL qualification and who works full time in this role. There are also three teaching assistants assigned to the unit. This caters not only for Polish and other newly arrived migrants but also for children born in Britain who do not speak English as their first language. They thus have a wealth of experience to draw on in supporting Polish children.

Newly arrived children undergo a specific period of induction to help them acquire the skills and language to access the curriculum. They are integrated into the classroom for most lessons but those who need language support attend the unit for an intensive language course every day during the literacy hour. As the EMA coordinator explained:

> *It follows a standard ESOL course where you look at different scenarios like greetings, you do one week on that and then you might go on to questions and different scenarios. And then you work through 20 scenarios, working on the language structure. First we do speaking and listening and then we teach them to write.*

The programme was developed for older children who can translate from their own language into English since they have an understanding of basic structures of language. This is more difficult for younger children who do not have this knowledge. She went on to explain:

> *We can't just transpose that* [induction programme]. *We are looking at ways to use the structure for the younger group. ... We do lots of songs, phrases which they really enjoy, it's not reading and writing,*

it's just verbal but it does get them talking, they play games. And of course in the nursery they are talking anyway.

The children follow the induction programme for the first 12 weeks and this gives them the 'survival' language which they need to adjust to their new school environment. While the function of the EMA unit is primarily to support language acquisition, the coordinator acknowledges that it also plays a key role in helping children to adjust to their new environment.

It's about being comfortable. And looking at the way they learn. It takes them a little time to settle in. And maybe something that is acceptable as the norm in once place is not somewhere else, standards are different.

The programme provides them with basic English but not enough to follow the specialist curriculum and they need continuing support within the classroom both from the classroom teacher and support teachers. The programme thus involves spreading good practice to classroom teachers and providing support and information about how to support these children. Some children may continue to attend the unit on a daily basis for a term, while others may be integrated back into the classroom for literacy lessons at a faster rate. Thus the school achieves a balance between integrating children while at the same time providing specialist language support in a way that does not place a heavy burden on class teachers. One of the classroom teachers in the school described how the EMA unit provides on-going support to help children access the curriculum:

The EMA team have translated all the key words for science and RE into a book…into all the main languages, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish. So there is provision there and in the EMA team there are people there who speak those languages. So if you feel you are at a loss, they can help. Also with science, the children may go out, the week before you do the actual lesson, and then they are hothoused, they are shown the vocabulary in their native language, so when they taught in the lesson, it is not the first time they are hearing it, so they don't have to cope with the language issues as well as understanding the content. I think that works really well for us.

The induction programme being run in this school is relatively recent but appears successful and children achieve well after a few months. Detailed monitoring is undertaken of the progress of individual children to ensure that they reach the expected levels and the figures showed considerable progress. There appeared to be a close relationship between the school and the borough EMA team and they worked both with senior school staff and EMA coordinators and with individual class teachers. As one explained:

We very much work in a mainstream way, skilling class teachers to support children who are EAL to make them feel included. So classroom strategies, working with the national EAL programme, using that as a tool to raise awareness of what good teaching looks like in an EAL context. You are teaching the language and also curriculum.

The school has received visits from less experienced EMA coordinators in the borough in order to share good practice. It was clear that the schools in other boroughs did not receive the same level of support from their local authorities and were unsure how to find resources. As one teacher who was responsible for literacy in her school said:

I meet up with teachers from across the borough and we were talking about Polish and EAL. I suppose that was one of the things that was brought up by everybody that nobody felt that they had had enough support or been told this is the right thing to do. Everybody was stumbling through the dark and doing

what they think is right, but nobody has specifically said, this is good practice, this is what you should aim to be doing.

Teachers were often unaware of the resources available from local authorities or nationally. As one said: '*We don't get any resources but we haven't looked for any either*'. And another remarked: '*I wouldn't know where I would go for resources.*' Another complained

> *You can search for hours and you can go to Dfes or whatever they are called now, and use brochures and publications, but you are just picking at things. It seems a bit silly that there isn't someone saying 'this is going to work best'.*

Small group support

Most schools use a combination of small group support outside the classroom and support within the class. The agenda of inclusion means that children need to be included in classes as much as possible and one teacher suggested that '*we know they work better when they are with their friends*'. But at times this may be counterproductive if they are unable to follow what is going on. The literacy hour, for example, may be used to withdraw children. As one teacher explained:

> *They are working at their chronological age. So if they stay there they won't be able to access it, they are just wasting their time. It is OK to listen in to get their ear in but every day, for an hour, they'll be bored, they'll be disaffected.*

Whereas the induction programme discussed above involved a qualified teacher with additional ESOL training, the language support in other schools often relied on teaching assistants. They may focus on basic literacy at first but later this may be geared to supporting particular areas of the curriculum where specific support is needed:

> *With maths they often do a revision session at the end of the week, revising what's been covered in the class.*

Where staff speak Polish they can translate the more specialised language so that children can participate as in the lessons. One Polish teaching assistant explained how she went beyond the expected role, giving them homework to encourage their learning:

> *I always try ... to give them homework regularly, for instance spelling list ... I write down the words which they will find useful later so when they learn them they will be able to understand what is going on during the lesson. ...it is not practiced here in the school but I do it anyway… and they are very proud when they return the sheet and it is all correct. So it is such a motivation and they always go and show this test to their parents and they are so proud!*

This type of support may be given in the classroom. A teacher described how a teaching assistant gave intensive support to one child:

> *The assistant spent an hour each morning with R trying to help her to acquire English quickly. Because until she acquires English she is not accessing anything and there is no understanding.*

This may also involve a Polish speaker translating for them where necessary. This would allow children to do the same work as rest of the class but with additional support available if they need translation. As one teacher said, this can be particularly unimportant in more technical

subjects such as maths *'because sometimes there is just one small thing that a child is missing and explaining solves the problem for this child.'*

The availability of this kind of support may be limited because support staff have to work with a range of children, including those with special needs as well as often children from a wide variety of backgrounds.

Classroom strategies

While there may be support either through withdrawal or within the classroom, for much of the time teachers have to manage classes on their own, inducting new learners while teaching thirty other children often with diverse needs. As one said *'all these things take time. You have to pull apart each lesson, and bear in mind you might have 6 lessons in a day'.* They will also have to find ways of communicating with children who have little or no English and to involve them in learning. The classroom teachers we spoke to had strategies to deal with this situation but most felt that they had had to devise these on their own and often felt unsupported and unsure of how best to handle the situation. Many emphasised non verbal means of communication as a way of getting children involved in learning.

> *You just create opportunities for them, lots of computer work is good, children like that and they pick things up'. There are schemes that might be used, certain books.*

> *People learn in different ways, so EAL children might need more visual cues and more hands on so they are learning the language from experience. We try to use those things anyway for everybody, so that helps the EAL children.*

Several have developed resources which help children familiarise themselves with important aspects of schooling and helping to understand the English words. One teacher reported:

> *We have a pack that all new children are given, new children with English as a second language. It goes through the basics, things they will find around the school, numbers, and colours. English words, colouring, and different activities for them to do. It gets harder as you go through.*

However, as she explained, this is not something that the children can work with alone: teachers have to work with the children and thus it takes time away from other tasks. Another described how the interactive white board could be used to engage EAL children in lessons. In a science lesson on planting seeds, the children had pictures of pots and soil and she wrote the words next to the pictures for them.

As one teacher pointed out, there is a tension between understanding the language and being able to offer them learning at the appropriate age level. As she said, *'You don't want to go too much back to basics because some things they will know in their own language'* Many Polish children appeared to do very well in maths before they had caught up with their English since there is less language involved.

Children may acquire the ability to communicate at a basic level quite quickly – playground English – but take much longer to learn the English necessary to access the curriculum fully. They may make *'massive leaps in progress and then slow down as language acquisition becomes more difficult'.* They may appear to 'get stuck' at a particular stage, reaching a 'plateau' beyond which it is difficult to progress. This problem may be difficult for teachers to recognise, as one commented.

I think the real struggle is the children who get to stage 3 or 4, in the old fluency stages, but they have not progressed beyond that point, they can carry on a conversation but they don't have higher order thinking skills. Those children need support too but we may miss those because they are doing OK but they don't progress beyond that level.

A particular problem is learning the specialised language they need for particular areas of the curriculum and thus they need continuing support to acquire this language.

Their spoken English, their playground English that comes first and then they can interact and even participate in classroom discussions. But then when the language becomes more specialised, so maths or science language, that was when you see the gaps opening up.

While not language specialists, class teachers have to use strategies to develop language skills. This often involved paying attention to the structure of the language as these teachers described:

I use shorter sentences with them, provide them with sentence starters. I get them to say what they want and then I will scribe it for them.

I have a sheet with 14 different language structures and the idea is that every week we focus on a different language structure and we weave that into the lesson. The skill of questioning, for example, I have lots of examples and they might use in their science lesson or maths.

One teacher pointed out that what is good practice for EAL and SEN is good practice for all pupils.

If you came to my lessons you would see a lot of speech, a lot of use of talk partners, and a lot of use of sentence starts as well, so they are not saying things like 'yeah, well, yeah, I reckon' but rather 'I think this because...' It is very structured and very tailored to the learning intentions in the hope that they will adopt these strategies as well. They need to rehearse orally their work before they write it down.... What you are trying to do is give strategies for independence and you give them these strategies in the hope they will absorb them.

Schools have a variety of resources available within the classroom. For younger children, who do not have language or written skills in Polish, simple games like matching vocabulary games, or snap which help them to acquire basic words and to use them with other children. For older children school dual language books were found to be very useful and this would allow them to try to work out for themselves. But as one teacher pointed out, they did not have curriculum books in Polish since the emphasis is on getting them to speak English. Similarly dictionaries are essential but don't cover all their needs:

We've got some Polish dictionaries but they are either too simple and they don't have the curriculum language you need or they are adult dictionaries and too difficult. It would be nice – and I think this is a gap in the market – if there was a Polish school dictionary which has ... the more technical language that is more difficult. A lot of that is not even in an adult dictionary because it's too subject specific.

Support from Polish-speakers

Other children

Many classes in London primary schools now have several Polish-speaking children and teachers may rely on them to support new children, helping them to feel comfortable when they first arrive and translating for them where necessary. Two teachers described how this had been a routine part of their integration of new children.

> *If a new child arrives you buddy them up with someone else and you try and chose someone you know speaks the same language as them, who can translate, who supports them around the school.*

> *All new children have a buddy, but if it is a child who speaks little English, it might be two buddies, one who speaks their language and then one who maybe doesn't.*

There is of course the danger that they will speak Polish rather than English which can delay learning the language. Teachers use a variety of strategies to try and balance the benefits and problems.

> *I like to have them together at the same table but not on the carpet, I have separated them on the carpet. At the beginning they were together to settle them in and then once they started to understand a bit more I separated them to work with some higher ability children. Because obviously they would be good models of English.*

One teacher described how she would avoid placing two children who spoke the same language next to each other, because they would become too reliant. She would, however place them nearby rather than across the other side of the room:

> *So they don't have to shout out across the room in Polish, because they become self conscious about speaking Polish. A [who has been in Britain longer] wants to speak English in class now and not have to speak in Polish all the time in front of other children.*

There may also be pressure for children to act as a go-between for the school with other children. One teacher described how she had asked a child to ensure that she got her parents' consent form signed for a trip.

> *She has to go home, and she has to tell her parents and get the form signed. .... I got A to tell N that she had to go on the trip, but I have to be careful because A is also 11, she is a peer, and I have to be careful what I am asking her to tell N. I don't want it to sound like A is having to tell N off, because that would be really wrong. So I have to be very careful how I put things.*

Older children may also be used to translate for their parents at parents' evenings, which is not satisfactory since teachers are unable to communicate in the way they would want to with parents.

Some children are reluctant to be forced to spend too much time with Polish children and may prefer to be with English-speaking friends. A project by Tower Hamlets' EMA team, in which children from a variety of countries were interviewed, revealed the importance of these friendships. None had spoken English when they first arrived and, asked what was most important to them at that time, all responded that it was having English friends.[6] The importance of friendships was emphasised by an EMA consultant: *'it was about friends. About being somewhere secure and safe and being with friends'.*

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[6] www.towerhamlets.gov.uk

Polish-speaking staff

Many schools now have Polish-speaking staff who are either mainstream teachers or teaching assistants who support individuals or groups of children. Many teachers spoke of the invaluable role they play.

> *It's obviously fantastic having A, it's a lot easier to communicate.*

As another teacher put it *'it is all to do with confidence. If you are a child you need adult reassurance and you need to know that there is someone and somewhere that you can go to'.* They may play a wider role in the school, supporting children when required, translating material and communicating with parents. A headteacher in a school describe the importance of their Polish TA.

> [having the TA] *has been absolutely key to establishing good relations with our Polish families. People come in looking very worried and concerned. They're leaving a child in school who may have very little English. And to find that there is someone in the school on the staff with whom they can communicate in an emergency – you find some parents quite tearful.*

Polish speaking staff are able to smooth many situations where communication can be difficult, for example sending out letters in Polish or making phone calls if the child is not well. They may, however, find difficulty in retaining boundaries around their role and experience pressure to do too much which can lead to exploitation. One teacher described how her TA stayed behind in her own time, often till 8 o'clock at night, to help translate for at parents' evenings. Parents may also see them as a resource. As another TA suggested:

> *I think it must be known in the community that I am Polish and a [teacher] so they come and look for me if they have a problem. They will ask 'I've got this letter what does it mean' and I will explain. So they help each other or they come straight to me.*

She also found that children came to her continually for help with problems:

> *I cannot eat my lunch quietly because all the time someone is knocking at my door… they come with all their problems, probably really more to chat, the children really appreciate that there is a Polish person here because someone can help them for instance with their problems with classmates.*

Polish speaking staff may experience tensions, seen as both part of the school and mediators for the community. This can place them in awkward situations. Schools have to be conscious of the need to be clear about roles. As one teacher said about her Polish TA:

> *B will make the phone call on behalf of the school. .... But obviously it's not about raising the concern with her, it's more about that communication to go to the class teacher, raising issues that need to be dealt with. It's not about bypassing the class teacher; it's having that additional support.*

TAs are sometimes called upon to insist that parents cooperate with the school, which can strain the relationship. Anna described a conflict with the school in which she had been asked to collect her child at lunch-time since his behavioural difficulties made it difficult for the school to cope. The TA had been asked to ring her to convey this message and rang again when Anna was late because she had a problem with finding care for her other children. She was upset and confused and felt unsupported.

Speaking Polish or speaking English?

Many schools see having Polish speakers available as a huge advantage, but it also brings potential problems and issues of balance. Being able to speak in Polish can help children feel comfortable and allow them to access the curriculum at a higher level, but may impede their ability to learn English. Teachers tend to set rules about when Polish may be spoken. One, who felt that children were becoming too reliant on being able to speak Polish said:

> *We have made a deal now. In the playground it's fine, if I ask them to translate it's fine, but any other time they must speak English.*

Teachers are aware of the value of the children speaking their own language even if it might make it a bit slower to pick up English. As one put it: '*It's important that they can see their language and culture as really recognised as an asset.*' Another described working with a child who spoke little English:

> *We had a dual language book, we used to look the words up together, I'd ask how you say it, we leant together, I would use the language to him. Single words, and maybe phrases – Saying things in their language makes them feel included. And they put those words in class and share it round the school, with posters.*

While the priority at first may be to ensure that children can speak in English, once they are able to communicate their learning may be enhanced by using Polish. As one teacher explained:

> *We do a lot of mind maps and that kind of planning within lessons and I do say that once their English is a bit better they can do their mind maps in Polish if it then helps them to do their work in English, just because the thinking might be quicker in Polish. Which some of them have chosen to do.*

Many children live in a mainly Polish speaking environment outside school and one of the Polish speaking TAs suggested that this could delay their language acquisition:

> *They progress very slowly and I think it is caused by the fact that there are so many Poles here and because of TV. Children talk Polish with one another and they watch Polish TV. Those children who have access to English TV they speak more and more English and you can see better results with those kids*

Being secure in your own language, however, is vital to feeling confident and thus being able to learn. All the parents in the study were keen that their children retained and improved their Polish language. Most of the children attended a Polish Saturday school. Anna said '*It is a must for them and an obligation*'. For her it was essential that the children learned Polish since the family planned to return to Poland. For others it was important that they maintained contact with Polish culture and history. As Greta said

> *Here we go to church but it is not like in Poland, we don't know anybody. And also Polish history I won't be able to pass anything to her.*

Some delayed sending their children to the Polish school until they felt they had learnt enough English. As Adam said:

I didn't push him to keep up Polish when he was first picking up English. But now he is using English grammar rules in Polish language and that sounds very funny. So that is something we need to get rid of, so he goes to Polish Saturday school in Balham and they teach them Polish language, history, Religious education and Music.

Ewa also delayed it until she feels she has settled:

I don't want to confuse her too much. When she passes her exam, when she has that stage behind her, she will be able to focus on the Polish language. She speaks Polish, but she makes mistakes in her writing because she did not have time to learn spelling. I don't want to overload her now; she has enough to do now.

Identifying special needs

> **When H arrived in year 3, I wouldn't have known how far behind he was in Polish. He couldn't count to five, but that could have been just English. But it was in Polish too and having a Polish speaking TA allowed us to see quicker whether there it was an underlying problem or just language. Eventually he was diagnosed with autism and is receiving more support**
> **(Class teacher)**

While the expectation of parents and children is generally that they will be high achievers, Polish children, like any other group, may have special educational needs. In most schools in our study, several were identified as having particular needs. The process of identifying that there is a problem and of getting appropriate support may, however, may be a long one as in the case of H above. In H's case having a Polish speaker helped with this process but communication with the parents was difficult due to language barriers and records from Poland were not passed on which also delayed the identification of the problem. It was then difficult to gain support because of the language barrier:

Because of translation everything takes twice as long so if you are waiting for educational psychologist to come and assess, they have to wait until they can get an interpreter .... So now it is going to be another year before we have a statement for him.

In one school no Polish children were on the special needs register and the deputy head reported that all were progressing well. A teacher in that school, however, felt that some of her pupils probably had particular needs, but she explained the difficulties in distinguishing the problem from issues of language:

There is a problem with children who are both special needs and EAL – it is difficult to work out which group they are part of. I have a couple of Polish boys in my class who are probably special needs and it is very difficult to assess their learning because they have not accessed the language as quickly as everybody else.

Behavioural problems, such as ADHD, may make it obvious, but other problems may be more difficult to pick up. Children take a considerable time to settle in and may not start speaking for some time. This may be due to the need to adjust rather than to a specific learning problem. B had a speech problem, which was evident in both Polish and English, but this was not was not picked up at first since he was too traumatised to speak as his teacher described:

When he arrived he didn't speak much at all. He was very unhappy, he would never smile, so he did not speak much and so no one heard the problem. But now he is a completely different child. He is so talkative

While early assessment may help them get the extra help they need, it is also important that they are given time to adjust before being faced with tests. One EMA coordinator suggested that some schools test too quickly and that this may not help the child. An additional problem is that, due to the later start of schooling in Poland children may not have learned to read or write in Polish and cannot be assessed in Polish.

The role of parents

The positive involvement of parents is crucial in supporting children's progress and making them feel at home in school. As one EMAG coordinator stressed, reading with the child can support their learning, even if the parent does not speak good English:

> *Even if they're not saying it 100 per cent correctly, they are reading or speaking another language. That's the main thing, to build up their confidence. One of the best places is at home because if you say it wrong it's not a problem.*

School staff reported generally positive contact and communication with parents and schools had developed a number of strategies to overcome language barriers. The following comments from teachers, comparing the involvement of Polish parents with that of other groups, were typical:

> *Polish parents are always the most supportive of you as a teacher, without fail they really are just very supportive ... which is something you don't get with English parents, some English parents it is so difficult.*

> *I think they communicate a lot with us, they feel very confident, they come and talk to me at the door, they arrange an appointment, I feel like I talk to them a lot. Unlike some groups of parents, like African parents, I don't feel that I talk so much to them and they don't feel so free to come up and talk to me.*

Communication involves a number of dimensions including issues concerning individual children's progress; school structures and expectations; and specific issues such as school events. There is also a need to communicate on an ad hoc basis, for example when their child becomes sick. Schools used a range of strategies to communicate with Polish parents, including both the general channels such as newsletters and parents' evenings, and specific events organised for Polish parents sometimes with other groups.

Language was a key issue and most of the schools in our study used a combination of translation of material and interpretation by Polish speakers. Different types of material were translated into Polish in different schools depending on the availability of Polish speakers and the attitude of schools and parents. In one case the governors had voted against the translation of material into Polish. One EMAG teacher reported that they had sent out a questionnaire to parents asking whether they wanted them, but only a small number responded. However the questionnaire was in English and, as she acknowledged, the parents may not have been able to understand it.

Translation can be fairly hit and miss. For example, much information needs to be sent out immediately when there is no time to translate it into Polish. This can mean that children miss out if for example parents do not understand that they need to sign a consent form for a trip.

Polish speaking staff clearly play a key role in facilitating communication. Many teachers and parents spoke positively of this, although they become over-burdened as discussed above. Where no adults are available within the school, school staff often had to spend considerable time trying to contact friends or other family members who may be able to help.

As well as the language barrier, there is often a lack of understanding of school structures and the expectations schools have in relation to such things as attendance and homework. The initial meeting with parents provides an opportunity for discussing these issues, but they may need to

be reinforced later with both written and verbal communication. One school organised drop-in sessions for specific groups of parents:

> *This year we had meetings with different parent groups like Polish, Lithuanian. Our team and other teams like the learning mentors, SEN coordinator. They came to talk to them about our school, just to talk to them about differences.*

In another case this arose because the Polish TAs was continually being stopped in the playground by Polish parents who had problems they needed help with. This meeting allowed them to raise their concerns and staff could explain how things work. Another school organised a meeting for Polish and Portuguese parents to explain *'what the school offers and what are the parents' responsibilities towards the school'*.

Another school used these meetings more as social events. The Headteacher organised coffee mornings for Polish parents to help them get to know each other and the school. She felt that some Polish parents didn't realize how many other Polish children there are in the school and that this would help them to develop supportive networks

Conflicting expectations

In general, many of the parents were happy about their children's progress and felt that they were achieving well. As Greta said:
.
> *She is in the highest level in maths now. She has never done physics before but my K is already on the top level in science and the same in English language. They can see that she knows and they give her homework more often, they pull her up ... Really I am very happy.*

Anna contrasted the efforts of teachers to include new migrants favourably with the situation in Poland:

> *I still think that it is incomparably better here than in Poland. Here in all the offices whenever you got in you see 'hello' and 'welcome' in Urdu, Russian, Polish ... in Poland it would never happen because we would never agree upon such an influx of migrants like here.*

Nonetheless, our research suggested that there was a serious mismatch between the expectations of parents and teachers in relation to the information provided about children's progress. Dissatisfaction with this was the most consistent theme in the interviews with parents but staff seemed unaware of this. In one school, for example, a senior member of staff described the concerns of Polish parents as *'just normal concerns that any other parent has, nothing stands out'*. Parents of children at that school, however, expressed considerable anger at what they considered inadequacies in the information they were given. Typical comments were:

> *I don't like that I do not know what children are doing, I have no clue what they are doing.*

> *I have no clue what the child does at school ... it's a disaster for me.*

> *I am not aware of what subjects he has, I know that he has maths, English and science but I don't know anything else; they do not give us a timetable. I have no clue what my child is learning.*

They wanted more concrete information about the child's progress and felt that they were being 'fobbed off' with generalities:

> *Here the teachers say only good things about children and I don't think it is adequate in reality. When you go to the parents meeting you don't expect to hear that your child doesn't cope with something or is disruptive.*

> *Attending parents meetings it was always 'steady progress, steady progress'.*

A particular concern was that they were unable to help the children catch up with their work if they were behind. As one said:

> *In Poland you have to learn because if you don't you repeat the year and they tell you straight away where you are weak and what you have to improve and you have to improve it to go into another class. But here you don't have to. You can go up but in fact you never learn what you are supposed to. I don't like it.*

Several parents were surprised at the way in which children were streamed by ability at an early age in British schools. Many mentioned that children had to sit at particular tables according to whether they were seen as being in the 'top' group. They were unhappy that, rather than being given extra work to enable them to catch up, children placed in the lower ability groups were given less challenging homework.

> *They do not have this policy to get it [what they did not understand] as homework. I was devastated because like this my child would never catch up because other children would be doing twice what she was.*

This way of thinking was apparent in the interviews with teachers. Several spoke of 'high, middle and low' ability children in rather rigid ways which clearly have implications for their expectations of these children's progress. The issue of streaming is of course a highly contentious one within pedagogy and we do cannot enter that debate here. The concerns raised by Polish parents, however, are worth exploring.

Parents expected their children to be successful and make up for the deskilling of their parents as a result of their migration. This was sometimes expressed in harsh terms, as for example by Marta who described her response to what she saw as her son's lack of progress:

> *I tell him he needs to get high grades. 'Do you want to work like dad on a construction site?'*

As we outlined above, parents in Poland have more direct information about the progress of their child on a day to day basis through homework. As one parent explained:

> *We have exercise books, we can always look through and see what they are doing. … I would love to know what my child is doing during lessons, what problems she has, how she writes, where she makes mistakes so that we could help her at home but we do not have this opportunity here.*

These parents clearly brought the expectations of schooling to the very different system in Britain and felt frustrated and disappointed. The kind of day to day information they demanded would clearly be difficult to provide in British schools not only because of the time and resources that it would involve but because the way in which teaching takes place is very different. The amount of homework Polish parents expect, for example is not considered appropriate at a young age. As one EMA coordinator explained:

> *It's not really [our way] to bombard them lower down. Some people feel that they are bombarded enough during school hours and they need something lighter, particularly when you are young, when you go home – reading is OK, it should be fun, but a lot of people struggle with mathematics, so if you have to do a lot of that and it's gruelling and you're 5 or 6 that's going to be detrimental to your schooling.*

Furthermore, the education system is more differentiated than in Poland so that there is no common set of targets on a daily basis which parents could follow. This is exacerbated by the diversity of languages and other needs which may exist within a classroom.

Interestingly, parents generally showed little awareness of the resources which schools used to support their children in settling into school. This reflected the limited preparation many made for migration and lack of awareness of the problems their children might face entering school in a new environment. Only one parent, Ewa, acknowledged this, comparing the situation in Poland unfavourably with that in British schools:

> *My attitude is that it is very good, that the school wants to help the children of migrants. But my emigration was my personal decision and I had to be prepared for all sorts of troubles that she could have here and I don't think that I have the right to place the responsibility on the shoulders of the school or the government to teach my child English just because she is a foreigner. I think it's the responsibility of the parent.*

Other parents, however, appeared to expect the school to deal with the problems of settling in and to operate in the ways they were used to. One Polish TA complained that Polish parents were continually comparing everything in Britain to what they experienced and expected back home in Poland. Speaking about the issue of school attendance, she said:

> *There is a different attitude, they are always making comparisons instead of trying to understand that it is beneficial for the child to attend and that they should not go for holidays whenever they want. So they find it difficult to adjusting to the new situation. If a woman is pregnant here, although there is very good medical care, no, she will go to a Polish doctor.*

Relying on comparisons with Poland rather than fully understanding how the British educational system operates may also impact on attitudes towards parents' role within the wider life of the school. While parents wanted to be involved directly in their children's education they were less interested in being involved in wider school activities. One mother, Lucja, felt that the school was more interested in involving parents in social activities than in keeping parents updated about children's progress. She suggested *'here there is only fundraising and fundraising'.* Some parents clearly welcomed the opportunity to participate in school activities. As Jolanta explained:

> *Every year there is a fun day organised at school and then I get involved, we bring cakes to school, it is a kind of fair, on Saturday. Polish mums bake their cakes, Italian mothers make their own delicacies. That is the way we fundraise for the school.*

Another major area of disappointment from parents was the lack of after-school provision. The Polish system offers a range of provision which not only supports children but provides care while parents are working. This, a legacy of the previous regime, is available only unevenly in Britain and is inadequate as a source of childcare. Polish parents are less used to participating in voluntary activities as the discussion about school activities reflected and expect this to be provided as of right rather than through involvement of parents.

The interviews with parents revealed significant problems of communication with schools. Some of these are due to language and lack of information and may be fairly easily remedied through translation. For individual parents, they may be relatively short lived as they gain more knowledge of the language and of the way in which schooling functions. Some of them, however, need a more long-term approach to overcome and would involve both schools and parents being able to discuss their expectations.

Conclusions

The arrival of many thousands of Polish children into British schools in a relatively short period of time has created both challenges and opportunities. Schools have to balance the need to integrate children into the classroom and the curriculum with the need to develop language acquisition as quickly as possible. The research discussed in this report illustrates that schools have developed different strategies for addressing these issues. Some have developed specific programmes for induction and specialised language support. Others tend to rely on a combination of small group work supported by teaching assistants and strategies developed by teachers in the classroom. All of these strategies have implications for resources which are already overstretched between competing priorities. There was also a marked difference in the support given by local authorities. In some cases the local authority provides regular support, information and advice, while in other cases teachers were not sure where to access the necessary information and tools to support their work.

Many of the interviews with both teachers and parents reinforced the stereotype of Polish children as clever, hard working and diligent. This image simplifies a far more complex reality. Not all were able to achieve as highly as their parents expectations, and we also found some evidence of special educational needs among newly arrived Polish children. Moreover, the process of language acquisition is complicated and it takes longer to achieve higher level linguistic skills than many may expect. While several parents were quite critical of the British educational system, there was nonetheless an expectation that teachers would help Polish children (who often arrived with no English at all) to achieve language fluency in a very short period. Some parents, however, were appreciative of the enormous efforts being made by the schools to welcome and facilitate new migrants.

Our study suggested that there were a number of areas in which the expectations and understandings of teachers and parents conflicted and that this could lead to frustration which impacted on relationships between parents and schools   All the parents we spoke to were very interested in their children's education and sought to be directly involved through helping with homework and having regular updates on their progress. Several were highly critical about the lack of regular feedback from teachers. Although most teachers we interviewed praised Polish parents for their work ethic and commitment to education, most appeared unaware of the resentment of parents at what they perceived as inadequate information about their children's progress.

It is clear that the process of adjusting to a new environment is not always easy or straight forward for children or indeed for their parents. Several interviewees referred to a sense of panic, culture shock and even trauma. Migration is an emotional process both for children and their parents. Language barriers, lack of understanding about how systems work, conflicting expectations and fear of failure can combine to create additional stress. Our research highlights the enormous work and dedication of teachers and schools as well as the high levels of commitment among Polish parents. It is also apparent that there is often a lack of effective communication about expectations, which can cause misunderstandings and unnecessary anxiety for parents.

Communication between parents and schools can be made more difficult because of language barriers and we found schools using different means to overcome this obstacle. Many schools are very reliant on Polish-speaking staff, particularly teaching assistants, to communicate with parents. While they play an important role, they can also run the risk of being exploited as they are called upon to help in so many different situations. Teachers also use children to transmit

messages to their parents with all the associated possibilities for misunderstanding and miscommunication. It is important that teachers and schools can communicate effectively and quickly with all parents and that there is a need for more consistent means through for example standardised letters in various languages. Many schools and other organisations have produced some such documents but what is often missing is a sharing of knowledge and information about resources.

In general, all the school staff we interviewed were very positive about Polish children and the contribution they made to the school environment. While this report has focused in the main on the issues that need most attention, resources and discussion, that is not to suggest that the picture was particularly negative. However, it is apparent that the integration of Polish children is largely reliant on the hard work and dedication of teachers and TAs and that additional resources are needed to address many of the issues raised through this research.

Recommendations

The research raised a number of issues and concerns and suggested policy responses for various levels, from classroom teachers to national. Some of these would be good practice for any group of children and parents, whether English speaking or not, since good EAL teaching is good practice in general. While some would therefore mainly affect Polish children, in many cases we suggest they could be generalised for other groups. Moreover, the better inclusion of Polish children would improve the experience of schools for all, both teachers and parents.

1. Spreading good practice and knowledge
The research identified many examples of good practice and of appropriate resources in individual authorities or schools. There was, however, a lack of awareness of these strategies and resources by many teachers. There is a need to spread this knowledge at all levels – within schools, local authorities, and at national and European Union level.

Local authorities have a key role to play in disseminating information, training, resources and skills. They may also need to focus on monitoring and supporting the achievement of Polish children across the borough. This clearly has implications for resources. It requires time for teachers to spend outside the classroom, for example in visiting other schools and attending training and meetings. It is also important that the EMA coordinators for individual schools are freed up from full time classroom responsibility in order to manage this role effectively.

2. Reflecting on practice
The parents' interviews raised concerns about too rigid and early streaming of children and low expectations of those considered to be 'low achievers'. These concerns need careful consideration in relation to teaching practice and classroom management as a whole.

3. Teaching Resources
The availability of resources was sporadic and more could be done by schools and LEAs to promote information about available materials to support those teaching Polish children. These would include both Polish language and bi-lingual resources and material on EAL teaching and on the experience of Polish children.

Polish language resources
Teachers found dictionaries and bi-lingual texts useful. Particular gaps were identified in relation to the needs of children attempting to access the curriculum. This reflected the difficulty of progressing from everyday or 'playground' language to more technical language. Schools and local authorities might consider developing the following resources:
- Dictionaries which cover the topics in the school curriculum
- Dual language texts which cover curriculum related material
- Dual language stories at a higher level
- Banks of vocabulary which would allow class teachers to communicate particular technical words
- Tests available in Polish in order to speed up the process of testing children's ability and identifying special needs

4. Staffing
Staff identified the need for training on language acquisition for classroom teachers, particularly to help them move children from basic to higher level. This might include a greater emphasis on grammatical structure.

Staff also need information on the background of Polish children, and particularly the differences in the educational system. This may also be facilitated by projects such as establishing links with Polish schools through exchanges.

Polish speaking staff
Polish speaking staff played a vital role in all the schools in the study. Schools should consider recruiting Polish-speaking staff at all levels. There is, however, a danger of relying too heavily on teaching assistants, who are both low paid and often over-worked as well as often having limited qualifications. Training opportunities for this group are essential.

5. Engagement with parents
This can be facilitated by both written and face to face communication and through written and internet resources, for example:

- A bank of resources in dual language which could be adapted for particular circumstances and available electronically and as a web resource. These could include school newsletters, school information packs, standard letters for example consent forms for school trips. Placing the text side by side could encourage parents and children to improve English skills.
- Information about the British school system and organisation and expectations of parents in relation to e.g. attendance, uniform, homework. This could be provided at induction meeting and reviewed through discussion with parents and staff.
- Meetings for Polish (and where appropriate other groups) parents on specific topics to develop more effective communication and dispel misunderstandings. One example could be the method of teaching maths in British schools
- Parents could be encouraged to become involved with the school through for example:
  o Helping with translation and interpretation
  o Involvement in wider school activities – multicultural evenings, fairs
  Provision of space for parents' meetings and special activities – e.g. information and advice sessions, English language classes, could be considered.

6. Improving the information available to parents considering migration
Polish authorities could be encouraged to be more active in the distribution of information about the British school system in Poland to those considering migration.

Appendix 1: Characteristics of the Polish population

There are considerable difficulties in gaining an accurate picture of the Polish population in Britain. The **Census** is the most widely used statistical source in research. It is a 'universal' survey and thus includes the whole population but is of limited use in relation to the Polish population since it is carried out only every ten years and the last census was in 2001. More relevant is the **Labour Force Survey** (LFS), carried out every quarter so more recent data are available. The LFS is based on a sample survey of households which is intended to be representative of the whole population. It provides data on a range of social indicators broken down by either country of birth or nationality. In view of the sample size, however, it is not always reliable for smaller sub-groups of the population.

Another source is the Home Office's **Accession Monitoring Reports** which includes data from the Workers Registration Scheme set up with EU enlargement in 2004. Employees from the new member states of Eastern Europe (the 'A8' countries - Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic) were required to register within a month of taking up employment and at each change of employment. It is widely believed, however, that many workers fail to register, particularly those who continued in informal employment and the figures have been described as 'implausible' (ALP, 2005: 1). Self-employed people, including professionals and entrepreneurs, are not required to register. The figures do not a measure people currently working in Britain but are a cumulative total of all registrations with the scheme. They include multiple registrations by individuals who have had more than one employer and those who have subsequently left employment, including those who have returned to Poland. Nevertheless they provide some insight into the composition of this new workforce. For the period from May 2004 to June 2008, there were almost 570,000 registrations by Polish people, 66% of all applicants (Home Office, 2008: 9).

The size of the Polish population

The labour Force Survey estimates that the UK Polish population in 2006 was 242,600, of whom 75,500 were based in London. The number of Polish people living in Britain increased almost three-fold between 2001 and 2005 (LFS, 2007).

Table 1 - UK Population by Nationality, 2006

Nationality	UK	London
Total	58,840,800	7,352,300
UK	55,392,200	5,957,700
Non UK	3,448,600	1,394,500
Poles	**242,600**	**75,500**
% of total	0.4	1.0
% of non-UK	0.1	5.4

Note: Figures rounded to the nearest thousand
Source: LFS 2006

Polish migrants are increasingly settling outside London but there remain high concentrations in London and it is the region with the largest absolute number of Polish nationals. Poles are spread across all London boroughs, making up significant proportions of the population in Westminster (5.5%) and Camden (2.8%) (Pollard et al 2008). Table 2 shows that a smaller proportion of Polish people in London are recent arrivals than elsewhere. The WRS figures

confirm this trend. London is now only the third most popular destination for registered workers, with Anglia and the Midlands having higher numbers (Home Office, 2008: 17).

Table 2 - Polish nationals by region and percentage of recent arrivals, 2006

Region	Poles	Recent Arrivals *
North East	2,300	80.5%
North West	20,400	84.1%
Yorkshire & Humberside	21,500	96.5%
East Midlands	27,200	93.9%
West Midlands	15,700	95.8%
Eastern	21,400	89.5%
London	**75,500**	**67.8%**
South East	24,500	84.1%
South West	12,900	82.3%
Wales	3,600	87.9%
Scotland	13,000	94.2%
Northern Ireland	4,600	100.0%
UK	**242,600**	**83.2%**

* People who arrived in 2002 or later
Note: Figures rounded to the nearest thousand
Source: LFS 2006.

Gender and age structure

The demographic characteristics of the Polish population are very different from those of the population as a whole (Figure 1). Men make up a significant majority around 58% of the total (Table 3). A similar majority is found in WRS figures (57.4%), indicating that women are taking up employment in significant numbers (the figures are for A8 nationals as a whole). This represents, however, a significant change from the 1980s and 1990s when men predominated.

Figure 1 - Age Structure of Polish and UK nationals, 2006
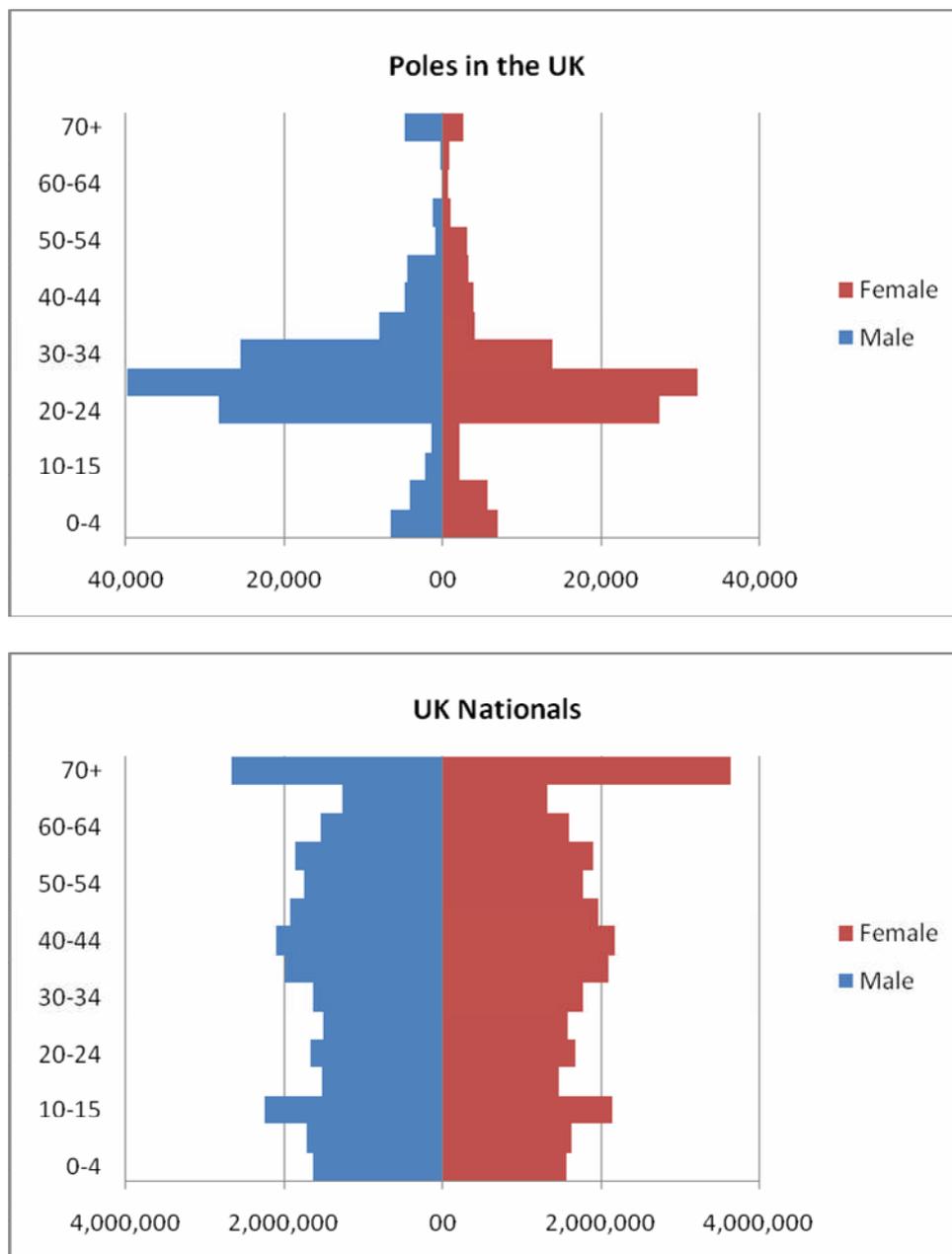
Source: LFS 2006.

There is a major concentration of Poles among those of young working age (20-34) and much smaller proportions in the older and younger age groups. This reflects the predominantly recent migration, with the majority entering to join the labour force. The low numbers of children reflect the limited process of settlement or family migration. This is borne out by WRS figures, which show that only 8% of A8 registrations were by workers with dependents living with them in the UK, 60% of whom were under 17 (Home Office, 2008: 11). This suggests that the majority either do not have children or that they have left them behind in Poland. Figures for the most recent period, however, show that the proportion increased to 10% in the year up to June 2008. Recent figures suggest that there are high rates of births to mothers from Eastern Europe

in British hospitals. [7]Table 3 shows that significant differences in the gender balance in different age groups, with men almost two thirds of the 30-49 age group while women make up the majority of the (much smaller) group in their 50s.

Table 3 - Polish nationals living in the UK by age and gender, 2006

	Male	Female	Total
0-15	**12,800**	**14,892**	**27,692**
16-29	69,551	61,926	131,477
30-49	42,580	25,217	67,798
50-59	2,086	4,296	6,381
60+	4,971	4,300	9,271
Total	131,987	110,631	242,618

Source: LFS 2006.

Economic Activity

This age structure is reflected in high economic activity rates (the proportion of the population in work or seeking work) for both men and women (Table 4). For comparative purposes we include figures for other selected national groups with diverse migratory histories. The proportion in employment is higher than the UK average and, of our groups, second only to Australians, whose migration also tends to be predominantly temporary. The higher proportion of inactive women can be explained by their unequal involvement in caring. Activity rates measure the proportion of all those aged over 16 in work (or seeking work) and thus also reflect the lower numbers from Poland in the post-retirement age group.

Table 4 - Economic activity by Selected Nationalities and Gender (%), 2006

Nationality	Male			Female			All		
	empl.	unempl.	inactive	empl.	unempl.	inactive	empl.	unempl.	Inactive
UK	66.2	3.9	29.9	53.9	2.7	43.4	59.8	3.3	36.9
Australia	88.0	3.5	8.5	80.2	2.0	17.8	84.0	2.7	13.3
Bangladesh	62.0	8.0	30.0	15.4	5.1	79.5	38.2	6.5	55.3
China	44.7	5.4	49.9	46.2	7.2	46.6	45.5	6.4	48.1
Poland	**87.8**	**3.8**	**8.3**	**70.7**	**5.9**	**23.4**	**80.2**	**4.7**	**15.1**
Total	66.5	4.1	29.4	53.8	2.8	43.4	59.9	3.4	36.6

Source: LFS 2006

Table 5 shows that Polish people are disproportionately employed in manufacturing, construction, distribution, hotels and catering and transport and communication. They are underrepresented in public administration, health and education.

Table 5 - Distribution by sector of workers of selected nationalities (%) 2006

Nationality	A-B	C-E	D	F	G-H	I	J-K	L-N	O-Q	X	Total

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[7] See BBC News, 29th January 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7215624.stm

UK	1.4	1.0	12.9	8.2	19.0	6.8	15.6	28.9	6.2	0.0	100.0
Australians	1.9	0.6	8.4	4.4	11.2	4.2	33.9	25.0	10.4	0.0	100.0
Bangladeshi	0.0	0.0	10.6	0.0	50.9	10.9	5.4	17.4	4.8	0.0	100.0
Chinese	0.0	0.8	9.6	1.0	40.7	4.9	16.0	27.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Polish	**1.4**	**0.0**	**21.2**	**12.7**	**25.1**	**11.6**	**12.1**	**9.7**	**6.3**	**0.0**	**100.0**

Source: LFS 2006.

Legend: A-B: Agriculture & fishing; C, E: Energy & water; D: Manufacturing; F: Construction
G-H: Distribution, hotels & restaurants; I: Transport & communication
J-K: Banking, finance & insurance etc; L-N: Public admin, educ & health
O-Q: Other services; X: Workplace outside UK

The differences are more marked in relation to occupational status. Table 6 shows that only 13.7% of Polish workers are in the highest three occupational groups compared with 42.2% for the population as a whole. At the other end of the scale, over half are in the lowest grade occupations, compared to less than a fifth for the population as a whole.

Table 6 - Distribution by occupational status, selected nationalities, %, 2006

Nationality	Occupational Status			
	1-3	4-7	8-9
UK	42.2	39.4	18.4
Non EU	46.5	32.9	20.6
Australians	69.7	25.0	5.4
Bangladeshi	22.2	44.7	33.1
Chinese	40.8	38.6	20.6
Polish	**13.7**	**29.9**	**56.5**

Legend

1:Managers and Senior Officials
2:Professional occupations
3:Associate Professional and Technical

4:Administrative and Secretarial
5:Skilled Trades Occupations
6:Personal Service Occupations
7:Sales and Customer Service Occupations

8:Process, Plant and Machine Operatives
9:Elementary Occupations

Source: LFS 2006

A study for the EU found that Polish migrants in the UK had substantially higher levels of deskilling (working in occupations below their skill and qualification level) than other national groups (Sales and D'Angelo, 2008). Table 7 shows that while nearly 84% of UK workers with a degree were working in the highest 3 occupational categories, only 35% of Poles were in these occupations, with only 6.1% in the highest group compared to 21.8% for UK nationals. Polish women experience particularly high rates of deskilling (Table 8). There are, however, growing numbers of professional migrants and registrations for doctors and nurses have increased (see for example Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2007).

Table 7 - Workers with a degree by occupational status (%)

Nationality	Occupational Status									Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
UK	21.8	40.9	21.3	7.1	1.9	2.5	2.4	0.7	1.4	100.0
Non EU	18.6	40.5	17.9	7.2	1.5	5.6	4.1	1.2	3.4	100.0
Australia	27.2	57.9	9.9	2.2	0.0	1.7	0.5	0.0	0.7	100.0
Bangladesh	0.0	65.0	4.4	3.5	0.0	5.1	0.0	22.1	0.0	100.0
China	13.3	30.6	17.9	11.8	0.0	3.5	15.2	0.0	7.7	100.0
Poland	**6.1**	**21.4**	**7.9**	**14.2**	**5.6**	**10.9**	**3.8**	**9.8**	**20.3**	100.0

Figure 2 - Workers with a degree by occupational status
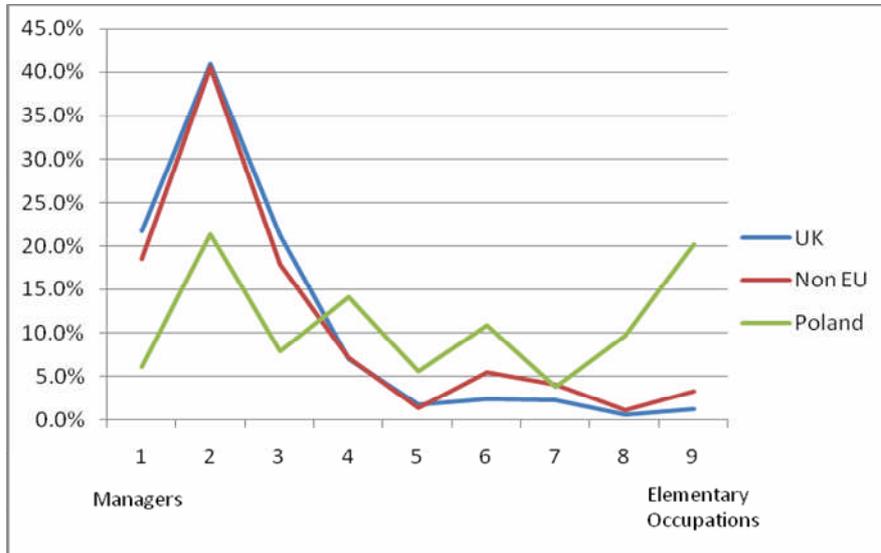
Table 8 – Deskilling: Workers with a degree working as managers or professionals*

Nationality	Males	Females	All
UK	86.7%	80.7%	83.9
Non EU	78.7%	74.8%	77.0
Australia	96.6%	93.2%	95.0
Bangladesh	59.8%	81.1%	69.4
China	62.1%	61.7%	61.8
Poland	**40.0%**	**28.6%**	**35.4**

Note: (*) Occupational status = 1, 2 or 3

Appendix 2 - Polish pupils and London schools

The only reliable statistical source on pupils and their characteristics is the School Census (formerly PLASC) conducted at local level by schools and coordinated by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). The School Census has only recently started to collect data on actual language spoken in addition to the main categories of 'English' and 'Other than English'. Provision of this data is not compulsory but the return rate increased significantly from 2007 to 2008. DCSF quality checks deemed the data supplied by specific language categories sufficiently robust to produce a national level report, summarised in Table 9.

Table 9a - Pupils' first language, England

	Number	% [1]
Pupils of compulsory school age and above	6,549,300	100.0
first language is known or believed to be English	5,711,110	87.2
first language is known or believed to be other than English	815,450	12.5
first language is unclassified	22,730	0.3
first language is known or believed to be Polish	**26,840**	**0.4**

Table 9b - Pupils whose first language is other than English (Top 10), England

	Number	% [1]	% [2]
specific language not provided	175,680	2.7	21.5
Panjabi	102,570	1.6	12.6
Urdu	85,250	1.3	10.5
Bengali	70,320	1.1	8.6
Gujarati	40,880	0.6	5.0
Somali	32,030	0.5	3.9
Polish	**26,840**	**0.4**	**3.3**
Arabic	25,800	0.4	3.2
Portuguese	16,560	0.3	2.0
Turkish	16,460	0.3	2.0
Tamil	15,460	0.2	1.9
Other languages	207,600	3.2	25.5
TOTAL [3]	815,450	12.5	100.0

Source: DCSF (School Census, January 2008)
(1) percentage of all students; (2) percentage of pupils whose first language is other than English;
(3) all pupils whose first language is other than English
Note: Provision of specific language was not compulsory. Of pupils whose first language was other than English, a specific language was reported for 79 per cent. Some 240 different languages were recorded.

The table shows that there were at least 26,840 primary and secondary schools pupils whose first language was known or believed to be Polish: 0.4% of all pupils and 3.3% of those whose first language is other than English. Polish is the sixth most frequently spoken language among those whose first language is not English.

Polish Pupils in the Boroughs in the Study

Local level statistics are currently available only for some local authorities and the results are not made available in consistent way. Hence, is has not been possible to produce an estimate of the overall numbers of Polish pupils across London. Tables 10 to 13 show available data for the London boroughs in which the schools in the study are located. These suggest that, although

Polish-speaking children make up relatively small numbers compared with more established language groups, as the Lambeth figures show, they are rapidly growing. The higher numbers in primary schools suggest a future growth in secondary school enrolment.

Table 10 – Ealing: Pupils' First Language by school type attended, January 2007

School type	Secondary		Primary		Special		Nursery		All pupils	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
All pupils	16,219	100.0%	26,964	100.0%	506	100.0%	352	100.0%	44,041	100.0%
English as first language	8,652	53.3%	11,745	43.6%	259	51.2%	125	35.5%	20,781	47.2%
Not obtained	92	0.6%	151	0.6%	14	2.8%	2	0.6%	259	0.6%
EAL[1]	7,475	46.1%	15,068	55.9%	233	46.0%	225	63.9%	23,001	52.2%
Panjabi	1,586	9.8%	2,625	9.7%	53	10.5%	44	12.5%	4,308	9.8%
Somali	908	5.6%	2,324	8.6%	38	7.5%	36	10.2%	3,306	7.5%
Urdu	861	5.3%	1,760	6.5%	30	5.9%	26	7.4%	2,677	6.1%
Arabic	479	3.0%	1,311	4.9%	17	3.4%	13	3.7%	1,820	4.1%
Tamil	276	1.7%	1,077	4.0%	8	1.6%	13	3.7%	1,374	3.1%
Polish	**272**	**1.7%**	**999**	**3.7%**	**3**	**0.6%**	**3**	**0.9%**	**1,277**	**2.9%**
Gujarati	494	3.0%	714	2.6%	21	4.2%	11	3.1%	1,240	2.8%
Farsi / Persian	265	1.6%	519	1.9%	10	2.0%	6	1.7%	800	1.8%
Hindi	193	1.2%	394	1.5%	4	0.8%	8	2.3%	599	1.4%
Others	2,141	13.2%	3,345	12.4%	49	9.7%	65	18.5%	5,600	12.7%

Source: Ealing Council

(1) EAL: English as Additional Language

Note: This data was collected from all maintained schools in Ealing through the Spring Term School Census on 18th January 2007. This is non-statutory but the majority of schools record this data about their pupils.

Table 11 – Hackney: Pupils' First Language [1]

Language	Number	Percent
English	12,169	47.7
EAL	13,365	52.3
Turkish	2,199	8.6
Yoruba	1,276	5.0
Bengali	1,223	4.8
Gujarati	731	2.9
French	589	2.3
Panjabi	496	1.9
Portuguese	456	1.8
Somali	418	1.6
Polish [2]	**369**	**1.4**
Akan/Twi-Fante	325	1.3
Total	25,534	100.0
Missing	215	
Total	25,749	

(1) Includes: Nursery, Primary, Secondary and Special Schools
(2) of which 277 in Primary Schools (1.6%), 90 in Secondary Schools (1.2%) and 2 in Special Schools (0.7%)
Source: Hackney School Census (Research & Statistics Office)

Table 12a – Lambeth: Pupils' First Language by school type attended, 2007

School type 2007	Secondary No.	Secondary %	Primary No.	Primary %	Others [1] No.	Others [1] %	All pupils No.	All pupils %
All pupils	**8,728**	100.0%	**20,155**	100.0%	**1,126**	100.0%	**30,009**	100.0%
English	4,950	56.7%	10,585	52.5%	645	57.3%	16,180	53.9%
Portuguese	526	6.0%	1,470	7.3%	37	3.3%	2,033	6.8%
Yoruba	527	6.0%	962	4.8%	41	3.6%	1,530	5.1%
Spanish	307	3.5%	838	4.2%	27	2.4%	1,172	3.9%
French	231	2.6%	804	4.0%	37	3.3%	1,072	3.6%
Akan/Twi/Fante/Asante	269	3.1%	709	3.5%	36	3.2%	1,014	3.4%
Somali	202	2.3%	749	3.7%	31	2.8%	982	3.3%
Arabic	118	1.4%	437	2.2%	22	2.0%	577	1.9%
Bengali	152	1.7%	352	1.7%	10	0.9%	514	1.7%
Polish	**68**	0.8%	**281**	1.4%	**2**	0.2%	**351**	1.2%
Others [2]	1,378	15.8%	2,968	14.7%	238	21.1%	4,584	15.3%

Notes: 1. nurseries and special schools; 2. including not known
Source: Lambeth, Research and Statistics Unit Pupil Survey

Table 12 b – Lambeth – Pupils' First Language in all schools, 1992 - 2007

Year	All pupils No.	English No.	English %	Polish No.	Polish %
1992	25,652	18,937	76.0%	34	0.1%
2000	28,126	17,778	63.3%	89	0.3%
2001	28,318	17,616	62.1%	91	0.3%
2002	28,330	17,384	61.3%	104	0.4%
2003	28,593	17,204	60.3%	136	0.5%
2004	28,825	16,939	58.8%	165	0.6%
2005	29,018	16,666	57.7%	194	0.7%
2006	29,661	16,432	56.3%	265	0.9%
2007	30,009	16,180	54.1%	351	1.2%

Source: Lambeth, Research and Statistics Unit Pupil Survey

Table 13 - Tower Hamlets: Pupils' First Language by school type attended

	Primary Schools		Secondary Schools		Primary and Secondary	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
All Pupils	16,750	100.0	14,480	100.0	31,230	100.0
English as first language	3,854	23.0	4,062	28.1	7,916	25.3
EAL	12,895	77.0	10,220	70.6	23,115	74.0
Bengali	10,741	64.1	6,003	41.5	16,744	53.6
Other	395	2.4	2,547	17.6	2,942	9.4
Somali	527	3.1	291	2.0	818	2.6
Arabic	203	1.2	100	0.7	303	1.0
Turkish	89	0.5	185	1.3	274	0.9
Yoruba	93	0.6	175	1.2	268	0.9
Chinese	103	0.6	152	1.0	255	0.8
Vietnamese	97	0.6	107	0.7	204	0.7
Portuguese	96	0.6	89	0.6	185	0.6
Urdu	104	0.6	60	0.4	164	0.5
French	82	0.5	62	0.4	144	0.5
Lithuanian	34	0.2	93	0.6	127	0.4
Spanish	63	0.4	58	0.4	121	0.4
Akan/Twi-Fante	41	0.2	77	0.5	118	0.4
Polish	59	0.4	48	0.3	107	0.3
Panjabi	49	0.3	57	0.4	106	0.3
Classification Pending	47	0.3	35	0.2	82	0.3
Gujarati	18	0.1	37	0.3	55	0.2
Russian	31	0.2	22	0.2	53	0.2
Hindi	24	0.1	21	0.1	45	0.1
Refused*	2	0.0	1	0.0	3	0.0
Not obtained*/Unknown	1	0.0	198	1.4	199	0.6

Source: Analysis on LBTH Children's Services and DCSF data

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