

## 2. Education policy and practice must continue to address barriers to newcomer children's school education.

In recent years a number of reports have raised concerns regarding arrangements for meeting the needs of newcomer children in schools. The number of school pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) has quadrupled in the last five years, from 2,056 in 2004/05 to 7,932 in 2009/10.<sup>8</sup>

NCB's research has found that school is generally a positive experience for these newcomer children. However, schools can find it challenging to provide appropriate EAL support. EAL funding is allocated on a per-pupil basis, so where schools have small numbers of newcomers, less money is available. In these circumstances, the Department of Education (DE) encourages a joined-up approach. EAL funding is also not earmarked, so schools could potentially use it for other purposes.

In 2009 DE published its policy on Supporting Newcomer Pupils.<sup>9</sup> This applies to pupils who do *"not have satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum"* and do *"not have a language in common with the teacher."*

In general, education authorities have focused on children's attainment and ensuring full access to the curriculum. Other needs may not be addressed, including children's need to make friends, feel that they belong, or deal with racism that they may experience.<sup>10</sup>

On a positive note, DE has funded the Inclusion and Diversity Service which has responsibility for assisting schools to integrate newcomers. This service is still relatively new and its full impact has yet to be seen.

*Duty bearers: DE, Education and Library Boards / Education and Skills Authority.*

## 3. Accurate, disaggregated data should be recorded and published regarding newcomer children in NI.

Accurate statistics about the numbers of newcomer children in NI are very difficult to obtain. School statistics will only record those who, for example, fit the EAL criteria. The school census also records pupils by ethnicity, but this also applies to 'settled' ethnic minorities, and is only recorded through 'white' or 'other ethnic groups', which includes Irish Traveller.

The primary difficulty in terms of NI statistics about asylum-seeking families, unaccompanied children or child refugees lies in the fact that the responsibility for compiling this information is not held by a single body. While the Home Office collects data, some information is not broken down in detail by jurisdiction, nor are child dependents disaggregated from adult dependents (where children arrive accompanied).

A 2008 report identified 54 refugee families originating from 17 different countries, living in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust area alone.<sup>11</sup> UKBA were able to indicate that 25 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arrived in NI between March 2007 and October 2008.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, unofficial figures point to an increasing number of newcomer children in Northern Ireland.

The disparate nature of the limited statistics and information available makes it very difficult to bring visibility to the needs of these groups of children in NI. Until this is addressed there will be increasing difficulties for regional policy development and for practitioners providing services on the ground.

*Duty bearers: Home Office (UKBA), NI Executive, particularly DFP (NISRA), DE, DHSSPS, DEL, DSD.*

