

Guidance for Schools on collecting and recording First Language Data April 2010

In 2007 the Department for Children, Schools and Families introduced new categories for monitoring pupils' first language. Data on first language is now collected for all pupils attending Kent schools. This guidance advises on the collection and recording of data on pupils' first language for monitoring purposes and for the regular School Census.

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Introduction

The School Census includes a question regarding Pupil First Language. This allows schools to record each pupil's first language, rather than simply recording whether or not that language is English. The implementation of the new language categories has rationalised the recording of the language information across all schools both within Kent and nationally.

Since the autumn of 2007, all school census returns and all Common Transfer File (CTF) data transfers have been using the new first language list. The full language list issued by the DfE contains 249 categories, all of which are available on SIMS.net. However, for collection purposes, it is recommended that schools use the more concise Kent list, which contains the most commonly used languages in the authority.

For further details on how to obtain either of these lists, please see section 2 of this guidance.

1) Why are we collecting first language data?

The collection of first language data is expected to contribute significantly to the planning and implementation of equality and diversity strategies. Good quality language data will provide schools with a better understanding of the linguistic and cultural heritage of their pupils and assist them in building an environment which is inclusive of all pupils. The valuing of linguistic diversity will also contribute to building

a language-friendly environment which can benefit all children by encouraging greater language awareness and openness to different cultures. Linked to other data in the School Census, the benefits of good quality language data to schools, LAs and central Government will include better information for schools about their pupils, including those pupils transferring from other schools and also a better knowledge of the communities being served. Language data will also support the analysis of pupil attainment at all levels and will provide schools and the LA with valuable complementary information to use alongside ethnicity data. It will therefore provide additional help for schools for self-evaluation, information management and the appropriate targeting of resources.

2) Collecting the data

Parents must have the opportunity to select a first language category based on the full list now available. In order to collect this data, schools should provide parents with the **Kent Pupil First Language Questionnaire**. Parents are required to select a first language for their child from this list, which contains categories specifically chosen to represent the most commonly spoken languages in Kent LA. If the required language is not listed, it must be recorded manually in the box at the bottom of the form and subsequently matched with a category from the full DfE list. If there is difficulty matching an 'Other' language to the categories on the full list, you may wish to contact parents/carers directly. As data for existing pupils will be transferred as part of the normal Common Transfer File (CTF) procedures, re-collection of data for pupils transferring to your school will not usually be necessary.

Collection of data on new pupils

Pupil language data should be collected as part of your admissions process. You are advised to obtain this information after parents have received confirmation of their child's place at your school, preferably at the same time as the collection of other personal data. You will also need to collect this information for new pupils arriving during the academic year.

Software Issues

The full list of new first language categories is available on SIMS.net. **The language chosen by the parent/carer/child should be recorded in the First Language field.**

Please note that after the new codes were introduced on SIMS.net, it was no longer possible to record first language using the following categories:

- Other Than English
- Believed to be English
- Believed to be Other Than English

It is important that pupils currently recorded under these categories are re-assigned to the correct new category, as determined by the parent or pupil. The Home Language field in SIMS.net will remain unchanged. This field is not related to any of the instructions or definitions included in these guidance notes. Data recorded under the Home Language field will not be collected as part of the census.

Definition of First Language

A pupil's first language is defined as any language other than English that a child was exposed to during early development and continues to be exposed to in the home or community. If a child was exposed to more than one language (which may include English) during early development, a language other than English should be recorded, irrespective of the child's proficiency in English. In the case of an older pupil who is no longer exposed to the first language in the home, and who now uses another language, the school should consult with the pupil or parent to determine which language should be recorded.

The role of pupils and parents in determining first language

For primary aged pupils, parents should determine the first language. For pupils aged between 11 and 15, the DfE recommend that decisions regarding a pupil's own identity are best made with the support and knowledge of their parent(s), in a family context. For pupils aged 16 and over, the pupils are expected to make their own decision.

Data on first language should be regarded as personal to that pupil and the individual's decision should be respected. If pupils or parents are reluctant to provide information they should be encouraged to do so but not be pressed. They have the right to refuse to provide sensitive personal data. If a pupil or parent has actively refused to provide this information schools must not record a language. The decision of a pupil aged 11 to 15 who is looked after by the local authority overrides that of the authority or the authority's designated carer.

See further advice below on supporting pupils or parents in providing language information and on acceptance of responses.

Supporting pupils and parents in providing language information

In most cases the collection of language information should be a relatively simple process. Some pupils or parents, however, might be reluctant to provide the information requested or might offer an incomplete response. In such cases, the school should consider one of the following approaches:

- (a) the pupils or parents could be invited to provide the information at a later date;
- (b) in the case of new pupils, accurate data may be more easily obtained if the pupil is first allowed time to settle in the school;
- (c) the school may be able to ascribe a language if they are confident that this can be based on valid information, with pupil or parent confirmation obtained at a later stage.**

In general, both pupils and parents will be encouraged to respond more openly and confidently if a positive attitude to linguistic diversity is promoted within the school.

The collection of language information will also be assisted if staff involved in the process have the opportunity to consult this guidance and the supporting material available on the DfE website.

Some schools may wish to support the process of collecting language information by using a variety of approaches. Individual cases could be followed up by a member of staff who knows the child well or by specialist EAL staff. A strategy which may be suitable across year groups or whole classes, and particularly in the case of older children and in areas of high linguistic diversity, is for schools to use classroom based language surveys conducted through a curriculum area such as modern foreign languages. Secondary schools may wish to consider this for Year 7 pupils.

Acceptance of responses

Schools should respect as far as possible the responses provided by pupils or parents. Those involved in the collection of language information, however, need to be aware that some responses would need to be followed up with the respondents.

(a) Some pupils or parents may provide only partial information for the reasons described in the previous section, and proficiency in a particular language may be understated or overstated depending on the perceived status of that language. In such cases, schools should adopt approaches similar to those appropriate with pupils or parents reluctant to provide information

(b) The same language may be returned under more than one name or by the name of a particular variety or dialect. Responses which do not appear to match any category specified in the look-up table should therefore be checked to ascertain whether they need to be recorded under one of the specific categories rather than under 'Classification Pending' or 'Other Language'. For this purpose schools are strongly advised to use the extensive language mapping reference document and other supporting material which are available on the DfE website.

4) Contacts and useful links

For guidance on choosing language codes and support with speaking to parents and pupils, please contact your District EMA Specialist Teacher. For additional support, please contact your Adviser for Minority Ethnic Achievement:

MCAS,

Sue Maharry, Adviser - Minority Ethnic Achievement

(Canterbury, Dover and Swale)

Clover House, Whitstable, CT5 3QZ

Telephone: (01227) 284419

Jacqui Brimson, Adviser – Minority Ethnic Achievement
(Thanet, Ashford, Shepway)

Kroner House, Ashford, TN24 8XU
Telephone: (01233) 898527

Carol Mellors, Adviser - Minority Ethnic Achievement
(Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling, Tunbridge Wells)
17, Kings Hill Ave., West Malling, ME19 4UL
Telephone: (01732) 525033

Sarah Goosani, Adviser – Minority Ethnic Achievement
(Dartford, Gravesham, Sevenoaks)
17, Kings Hill Ave., West Malling, ME19 4UL
Telephone: (01732) 525033

For SIMS software issues you should contact **EIS** via their helpdesk number 01622 683708 or your local software supplier.

For School Census guidance or entering codes into SIMS please contact

Your dedicated **MIU School District Contact** located via
http://www.kenttrustweb.org.uk/Finance-Assessment/maninfo_structure.cfm

or **E-mail: management.information@kent.gov.uk**

Copies of the Kent language questionnaire, Kent schools guidance note and letters to parents are available on the Management Information page on **Kent Trust web**.

The **DfE Standards Site** contains a page on the Pupil First Language collection within its Ethnic Minority Achievement section. The page includes:

- Generic guidance notes* (including the full list of new first language categories)
- Translated letters to parents*
- Language mapping document
- Language identification chart

http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ethnicminorities/collecting/Pupil_First_Lang/

***Please note that the resources on the DfE page are generic and are designed for use by all Local Authorities. Some of the dates and terminology used in the documents have been adapted for specific use in Kent schools. The adapted documents are available on Kent Trust Web.**