

## Chapter 4

# Pupils' languages

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### Introduction

Globalisation and changes in migration patterns have contributed to rapid socio-cultural changes in societies. However, while labour markets and broader society adapt to more diverse populations, education systems have generally been slower to address diversity. Children of migrant parents are often seen as a challenge to the education systems in their new country – “the successful integration of immigrant students into the education system presents a central concern to many countries worldwide” (OECD, 2006, p. 7). Within the microcosm of the school, migrant children are perceived to be at risk of poorer educational outcomes (early dropout, poorer exam performance), of limited participation in school life, and are sometimes characterised as a drain on scarce resources. Schools can be left the task of integrating migrant children and their families not only into a new education system, but also into new social and cultural norms.

In Ireland mass immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon. As a result, there are many data gaps related to the experiences of migrant children in Irish schools. It is against this changing cultural backdrop that the data from the PIRLS and TIMSS 2011 (PT 2011) studies can be interpreted. The PT 2011 data build on the relatively limited information available on the “non-traditional-Irish” pupil in the classroom, and, for the first time, allow for comparisons with other countries. Information on pupils’ home background was gathered from pupils and parents in PT 2011. As noted in Chapter 1 (Eivers & Clerkin, 2013), countries that took part only in TIMSS did not survey parents. Thus, most analyses in this chapter are based on the PIRLS dataset.

The remainder of this chapter is presented in five main sections, the first of which provides a broad introduction to changes in the Irish population generally, and changes in schools in particular. The second section outlines why the focus in this paper is on language spoken (rather than, for example, migrant status). Section three outlines some of the languages spoken in PT 2011, and country-by-country differences in the percentages of pupils who mainly spoke a language other than the language in which they were tested. Achievement differences, by language, are also outlined. The fourth section focuses on Ireland. It examines the distribution of second language and additional language speaking pupils within Ireland and summarises selected home and school characteristics of those pupils. Finally, the main findings are discussed and some conclusions are drawn. Readers should note that this chapter examines only a subset of the PT 2011 data. Those who would like more general information about PT 2011 are referred to Chapter 1 of this volume.

### Changes in the population and education system

Until the 1990s, Irish primary school classrooms were largely mono-cultural, mono-ethnic, and featured only two languages (English and Irish). However, the net immigration that characterised the period from the mid-1990s until 2007 has led to major changes in the

composition of Ireland's population. Census data from the period 1996 to 2011 show that the percentage of the population born in the Republic of Ireland gradually dropped, from 93% (1996) to 90% (2002), to 85% (2006), and currently is at 83%.<sup>1</sup> Until very recently, the percentages of the population born outside Ireland probably suggested a more diverse population than was the case. If those born in Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales are excluded (i.e., English-speaking and sharing many cultural characteristics) the percentage of Ireland's residents born "elsewhere" in 1996 was a mere 1.7% – few of whom were children. This rose to 9.2% by 2006 and in the 2011 Census was 10.6% – a more than six-fold increase in just 15 years.

Changes in the population have been reflected in classroom composition, albeit in a slightly delayed manner. Between the 2006 and 2011 censuses, there was a 50% increase in the number of "non-Irish national" children, much higher than the increase in the adult non-Irish national population (Central Statistics Office [CSO], 2012b). This suggests that Irish classrooms are starting to reflect the diversity found in the adult population. Unfortunately, very little school-based data are available beyond the past few years. For example, Ireland has carried out periodic National Assessments of reading and/or mathematics achievement among primary school pupils since the early 1970s. The studies have always collected a large amount of contextual data, yet 2004 was the first time that information was sought on country of birth or language of the home. Then, depending on grade level, between 8-10% of pupils were born outside Ireland, but less than 3% spoke a language other than English or Irish with their parents (Eivers, Shiel, Perkins, & Cosgrove, 2005).

In the 2009 National Assessments, 14-15% of pupils were born outside Ireland and 6-10% normally spoke a language other than English or Irish with their parents (Eivers et al., 2010). Thus, even within the short time between 2004 and 2009, differences are apparent. Data from Census 2011 revealed that 11% of Irish residents spoke a language other than Irish or English at home (CSO, 2012a). Although slightly higher than the percentage reported in the most recent National Assessments, it is broadly comparable because the census did not ask which language was *normally* spoken, and will therefore include languages spoken only on an occasional basis.

The Irish education system's initial response to population changes was based on an asylum-seeking model but gradually changed to recognise that most people who migrated to Ireland did so for economic reasons. Thus, the (then) Department of Education and Science (DES) set up the Refugee Language Support Unit in 1999, but the unit was subsequently reconstituted in 2001 as Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT). The first significant departmental publication related to the needs of non-Irish pupils was entitled "Information booklet for schools on asylum seekers" (DES, 2000). Much of the content related to explanations of government policy on asylum seekers, and issues related to their legal status and accommodation. Content specific to education largely focussed on human rights and anti-racism education. Relatively little attention was directed at language.

IILT's 2003 publication "Integrating non-English speaking pupils into the school and curriculum" was indicative of changing perceptions of migrant pupils. While it also outlined issues related to the legal status of such children, its primary focus was cultural integration and language support. The next significant DES document – Circular 53/07: Meeting the needs of pupils for whom English is a second language – completed the change. Asylum-seekers were no longer the focus, and the issues addressed were not socio-emotional and

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<sup>1</sup> Data were retrieved from the Central Statistics Office interactive database, <http://www.cso.ie/en/census/> on February 21, 2013.

cultural issues, but specific to language difficulties. Circular 53/07 defined three proficiency levels in English, and specified at which levels additional resources should be directed.

From an almost non-existent budget prior to 2000, educational spending on children for whom English was an additional or a second language (EAL/ESL) grew in an exponential and somewhat poorly planned manner. The recently published Value for Money review of provision for migrant pupils across the period 2001-2009 found that expenditure increased from approximately €10 million in 2001/02 to approximately €140 million in 2008/09, while related teaching posts (primary and post-primary) rose from 260 to over 2,100 during the same period (DES, 2011). However, the review also found a lack of strategic planning for delivery of services to migrant children, suggesting that the original ad hoc solution for small numbers of pupils had been inappropriately applied as a system-level solution for large numbers of pupils, making it neither efficient nor effective. In particular, the review criticised the lack of initial or continuing professional development (CPD) for EAL posts. For example, almost all EAL funding was consumed by teacher salaries, with only 0.7% spent on CPD, despite the fact that EAL support had not featured in most teachers' initial teacher education.<sup>2</sup>

Since the review, provision of additional support for EAL pupils has been re-structured. In 2012, the General Allocation Model of support was altered to combine general allocation and language support into a single allocation of "additional support" for all primary schools (DES, Circular 007/12). Specific additional support for EAL is currently provided only for schools with high concentrations of EAL pupils. Thus, over a relatively short period, educational provision for "non-traditional Irish" children has changed from non-existent, to limited provision targeted at problematised asylum-seekers, to large-scale, ad hoc provision based on limited English proficiency, and is now broadly subsumed under a general umbrella of children in need of additional educational support.

## Why focus on language?

It is important to define the group of pupils that are the target of the rest of this chapter. The classification of non-native-born children (or children of migrant parents) in any population can be quite complex, as reflected in the variety of terms used in schools, the media, and in research. For example, in addition to migrants, pupils are sometimes referred to as non-native Irish, second-generation, newcomer, non-English speaker, ESL or EAL. Classification can be based on one or more of the following, often overlapping, criteria: country of birth, parental country of birth, parental language(s), length of time living in Ireland. An additional consideration is ethnic minority status, which may be assigned based on factors such as nationality, skin colour, religious beliefs, or culture (as in the case of members of the Traveller community).

As part of PT 2011, the relevant data collected related to language(s) spoken in the home, teacher reports about pupils who experienced difficulty speaking the language of the test, and principal teacher reports on the percentages of school enrolments for whom the language of the test was a second language. Consequently, the focus of the paper is "additional language" pupils. In an Irish context, these are EAL pupils, operationally defined as those for whom *English* is not the exclusive language spoken at home. In Ireland, PIRLS was considered to be a test of English reading, and therefore was administered in English

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<sup>2</sup> Although issues related to EAL and second language learning now feature in initial teacher education, Irish teachers remain more likely than the norm not to have studied it as part of their formal training (teachers of 62% of Irish pupils, compared to a PIRLS average of 43%).

only. In contrast, Irish-medium schools could choose their preferred test language for TIMSS. This meant that some pupils might be considered to have two “languages of the test”. As the number of pupils taking the test in Irish was small, and to avoid Fourth class pupils answering a quite complex question about language, the item in the Pupil Questionnaire that asked pupils how often they spoke the language of the test at home referred to English only. Data about speaking Irish were therefore collected from the Parent Questionnaire only.

Within the group of EAL pupils, there may be further possible distinctions. For example, some might always have spoken English and another language at home, others might have spoken *only* another language prior to starting school (i.e., ESL pupils), and others may now speak only English, despite having a parent whose first language is not English.

As neither ethnicity nor place of birth were part of the TIMSS or PIRLS questionnaires, they will not be examined in this chapter. Moreover, from a pedagogic point of view, the issues associated with teaching pupils with limited proficiency in the language of instruction are quite different to those associated with differences in nationality or ethnicity, and merit separate treatment.

Irish research data on the educational achievement and experiences of EAL children (as distinct from migrant children more generally) are relatively sparse, especially in the case of data from larger, quantitative studies. Table 4.1 summarises some achievement data from the 2009 cycles of the National Assessments (NA 2009) (Eivers et al., 2010) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Perkins, Cosgrove, Moran, & Shiel, 2012). As can be seen, the percentage normally speaking a language other than English or Irish at home drops as age increases. Thus, while 9% of Second class pupils reported usually speaking another language at home, only 5% of Sixth class pupils and less than 4% of 15-year-olds did so. Whether this reflects different cohorts of children, the gradually anglicising effects of attending school in Ireland, or a mixture of the two is unclear.

Among Second class pupils, those who normally spoke “another” language obtained mean scores that were significantly lower than those obtained by English speakers on both the reading and mathematics assessments. (The comparison is restricted to English speakers and “other” language speakers, as the number of pupils who normally spoke Irish at home was quite small.) At Sixth class, the gap between the two groups for mathematics was much smaller (.22 of a standard deviation) and not statistically significant. In contrast, the gap on the reading assessment was very large (.83 of a standard deviation), and significant. However, the Irish data from PISA 2009 show a significant gap between native and “other” language speakers across each of reading, mathematics and science, with a gap of almost two-thirds of a standard deviation on reading achievement.

Table 4.1: Percentages from NA 2009 and PISA 2009 reporting a usual home language other than English or Irish, and relationship with achievement (expressed as a proportion of a standard deviation)

Study	Target group	“Other” language speakers	Gap between English & “Other” (proportion of SD)		
			Reading	Maths	Science
NA 2009*	2 <sup>nd</sup> class	8.6%	<b>.62</b>	<b>.44</b>	–
	6 <sup>th</sup> class	5.4%	<b>.83</b>	.22	–
PISA 2009**	15-yr-olds	3.6%	<b>.62</b>	<b>.40</b>	<b>.44</b>

Bold denotes a significant difference between English and “other” language speakers.

\* Source: Eivers et al., 2010. What language do you speak at home most often? (English/Irish/Other)

\*\* Source: Perkins et al., 2012. What language do you speak at home most of the time? (English/Irish/Other)

Similar data to those in Table 4.1 were collected as part of the 2004 National Assessments and in earlier cycles of PISA. However, until 2009, the numbers of EAL pupils involved were very small (from less than 1% in PISA 2000 and 2003 to just over 2% in NA 2004). This made it difficult to draw any firm conclusions about achievement differences, although, with the exception of PISA 2000, all show the same general relationship (native speakers tend to do better on tests than EAL pupils). Unusually, the Irish data from PISA 2000 showed a very small and non-significant advantage on the reading assessment for “other language” students, a finding probably attributable to the unusually high socioeconomic status of that particular group (Cosgrove, Shiel, Archer, & Perkins, 2010).

Oddities such as PISA 2000 aside, it is a common finding in international educational research that native speakers tend to outperform non-native speakers on assessments of academic achievement (e.g., Martin, Mullis, Foy, & Stanco, 2012; Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Arora, 2012; Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012; OECD, 2012). Language spoken appears to be more relevant to achievement than immigrant status. For example, the OECD’s publication “Where Immigrants Succeed” found that while language spoken in the home accounted for much of the achievement differences between immigrant and native students, the gap remained significant in most countries (OECD, 2006). Broadly similar findings were reported in the 2004 and 2009 National Assessments (Eivers et al., 2005; Eivers et al., 2010). Further, immigrants, even well-educated ones, tend to be clustered in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, and immigrant children tend to be overrepresented in “disadvantaged” schools (OECD, 2012).

Given the reported achievement gaps, it is perhaps not surprising that a deficit model is often applied to additional language pupils (Arzubiaga, Noguerón, & Sullivan, 2009). Not only are the children perceived to be “deficient” in their English proficiency, but the system is perceived to be deficient in how it prepares teachers to deal with their deficiencies (during both initial teacher education and CPD) (Lyons & Little, 2009). Similarly, EAL pupils are often described in terms of “challenges” to be faced. For example, when asked to list their three most serious challenges to the teaching of English, dealing with pupils from non-English-speaking families was one of those most frequently cited by principals in NA 2009. Specific issues reported by teachers include fears that communication with EAL pupils’ homes can be of lower quality in cases where the pupils’ parents do not speak English themselves, a lack of knowledge about the pupils’ competency in their native language, and a need for pupils to learn not only the formal language of instruction but also the informal social customs of their new school (Kitching, 2006; Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2006).

The view of EAL pupils as problematic is pervasive. As most readers are probably aware, the reading and mathematics performance of Irish 15-year-olds on PISA 2009 was considerably poorer than in previous cycles. One consequence was an attempt in some quarters to blame much of the decline on the increase in EAL and migrant children in Irish classrooms. While PISA 2009 data do show that children born outside of Ireland generally obtained lower scores on the assessments than did their native-born counterparts, they also show that the numbers of students involved is smaller in Ireland than in most countries, and that most non-Irish-born students spoke English. Indeed, if only “native Irish” students are considered, the drop in reading performance between 2000 and 2009 reduces to 26 points, slightly less than the overall drop of 31 points, but still the largest decline among participating countries (Perkins et al., 2012).

However, many teachers have also identified positive aspects of having EAL pupils in their classrooms, including satisfaction with the rapid progress of motivated, appreciative learners, satisfaction with their own contribution to (often) accelerated pupil success, and the stimulation of working with pupils from different cultures (Devine, 2011; Kelly, 2010; Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2006).

## Pupil language in PT 2011

Ireland is by no means unique in having a multilingual pupil population or in having two official languages of instruction. While a majority of countries that took part in PT 2011 tested in only one language, a sizeable minority did not. For example, of the 50 countries that took part in TIMSS Fourth grade, 16 tested in at least two languages. Most PT 2011 countries were like England, having a single language of instruction and a single language for the test materials. However, other countries such as Canada and the Slovak Republic are similar to Ireland in that different schools may have different languages of instruction. In these countries, test and questionnaire materials were translated into the languages of instruction.

Other participating countries have an official language of instruction that differs from the national language or the language(s) most commonly spoken in homes in that country. For example, in Singapore, there are four official languages (Malay, English, Mandarin and Tamil) of which Malay is the national language, yet English is the language of instruction in all schools and all pupils were tested in English (Ang et al., 2012). Another language model applies in countries such as Malta, where the two official languages (Maltese and English) are also the two languages of instruction, in an education system based on bilingualism, yet where the tests were administered in English only (Firman & Camilleri, 2012).

This illustrates the difficulty in assigning a uniform meaning to *language of instruction* or *language of the test*. It may be mother tongue, it may be one of two mother tongues, or it may be a different language entirely. It also illustrates that not every pupil whose home and school language differ are from a migrant family background. Bearing in mind those caveats, the focus in this section is on “additional language pupils” as defined by the match between the pupil’s language and the language of the PT 2011 test in his or her school. Thus, a French-speaking Canadian pupil might be considered an additional language pupil if he or she were in a school in British Columbia, but not in a school in Quebec. In the rest of this section, two main sources are drawn on to examine the achievement of additional language pupils – pupils’ self-reports, and the language that parents reported children as speaking prior to starting school.

### Pupil language: self-report

There was considerable variation between countries in the percentages of pupils reporting that they *always*, *sometimes* or *never* spoke the test language at home. The international study averages for pupils who *always* spoke the language of the test was 72% (TIMSS) and 73% (PIRLS). Thus, at 84%, Ireland had considerably fewer additional language pupils than most countries. Tables 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 contain information about home language and reading, mathematics and science achievement, respectively. As can be seen, even within the subset of key comparison countries, the percentage of pupils *always* speaking the language of the test at home ranged from 32% in Singapore to 91% in Northern Ireland. Across PT 2011 as a whole, Hungary, Northern Ireland, Poland and Serbia had the highest percentages of pupils (all over 90%) indicating that they always spoke the language of the test at home. In contrast, the most multilingual systems were in Tunisia, Malta, Morocco and Singapore, where no more than one-third of pupils always spoke the language of the test at home.

Tables 4.2 to 4.4 also show that, within country, there are generally very large differences between the mean achievement of those in the *always* and *never* columns. However, as relatively few pupils *never* spoke the language of the test at home, the last column in the Tables shows the gap between the more reliable data for the *always* and *sometimes* groups of pupils. The international average gap between the *always* and the *sometimes*

group is smallest for mathematics (9 points) and is largest for science (17). In Ireland, the gaps for all three domains were slightly larger than the study averages.

Among Ireland's comparison countries, Finland, New Zealand, and the United States show the largest achievement gaps between those who *always* and who *sometimes* spoke the test language at home – at least 25 points on each of the three domains. In contrast the Russian Federation had relatively small differences in the mean scores of pupils – only a 9-point gap for reading, and a 4-point gap for science, while those who *sometimes* spoke the language of the test at home outperformed those who *always* spoke it by 8 points for mathematics.

Table 4.2: Percentages of pupils reporting the frequency with which they speak the language of the test at home, by PIRLS mean achievement scores, Ireland and comparison countries

	%			Mean <b>Reading</b> score			Sometimes – Always
	Always	Sometimes	Never	Always	Sometimes	Never	
Australia	79	19	1	531	515	472	–16
England	79	20	1	556	540	503	–16
Finland	89	10	1	571	544	527	–27
Hong Kong SAR	68	28	4	574	572	544	–2
<b>Ireland</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>–16</b>
New Zealand	74	24	2	543	501	482	–42
N. Ireland	91	8	1	561	552	455	–8
Russian Fed.	85	13	2	571	562	540	–9
Singapore	32	62	6	588	562	518	–26
United States	86	12	2	562	523	511	–39
<b>PIRLS</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>517</b>	<b>504</b>	<b>466</b>	<b>–13</b>

Note. Differences between *always* and *sometimes* are calculated before rounding, and may differ slightly from calculations on rounded data presented in the table.

Table 4.3: Percentages of pupils reporting the frequency with which they speak the language of the test at home, by mean **mathematics** achievement scores, Ireland and comparison countries

	%			Mean <b>Maths</b> score			Sometimes – Always
	Always	Sometimes	Never	Always	Sometimes	Never	
Australia	80	19	1	520	509	460	–11
England	81	17	2	546	529	496	–18
Finland	89	10	1	548	525	518	–23
Hong Kong SAR	66	29	4	607	597	568	–10
<b>Ireland</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>518</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>–13</b>
Korea, Rep.	75	25	<1	602	616	531	+14
New Zealand	74	24	2	494	469	458	–25
N. Ireland	91	8	1	565	556	465	–10
Russian Fed.	85	13	2	541	549	534	+8
Singapore	33	62	6	620	603	572	–18
United States	86	12	2	546	515	488	–30
<b>TIMSS</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>494</b>	<b>484</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>–9</b>

Note. Differences between *always* and *sometimes* are calculated before rounding, and may differ slightly from calculations on rounded data presented in the table.

Northern Ireland showed relatively small gaps between the *always* and *sometimes* groups of pupils on all three domains (as little as 6 points for science), yet also had among

the largest gaps when those who *never* spoke the test language at home were examined – over 100 points below pupils in the *always* group on each of the three domains. Generally, countries with very few children speaking a different language at home tended to have the largest gap in achievement between the *always* and *never* groups. For example, in Hungary almost all children (97%) *always* spoke the test language, and the achievement gaps between the *always* and *never* groups ranged from 120 to 176 points, depending on domain.

Table 4.4: Percentages of pupils reporting the frequency with which they speak the language of the test at home, by mean **science** achievement scores, Ireland and comparison countries

	%			Mean <b>Science</b> score			Sometimes – Always
	Always	Sometimes	Never	Always	Sometimes	Never	
Australia	80	19	1	522	500	463	–22
England	81	17	2	535	503	481	–33
Finland	89	10	1	574	541	492	–34
Hong Kong SAR	66	29	4	542	530	490	–12
Ireland	84	13	2	521	501	458	–20
Korea, Rep.	75	25	<1	584	596	504	+12
New Zealand	74	24	2	508	471	438	–37
N. Ireland	91	8	1	519	513	415	–6
Russian Fed.	85	13	2	554	549	533	–4
Singapore	33	62	6	608	576	532	–32
United States	86	12	2	551	504	475	–48
TIMSS	72	22	6	492	475	438	–17

Note. Differences between *always* and *sometimes* are calculated before rounding, and may differ slightly from calculations on rounded data presented in the table.

Korea did not participate in PIRLS. However, Korean performance on both the mathematics and science assessment in TIMSS is unusual in two regards. First, roughly one-quarter of pupils report that they only *sometimes* speak the language of the test at home, and second, these pupils obtain a higher mean score than those who *always* speak the language of the test at home. This is unexpected, not only because of the higher score for pupils in the *sometimes* group, but also because Korea only has one national language, and very few immigrants. A likely explanation lies with Korea's many private kindergartens. A sizeable proportion are English-medium, and they tend to be popular with wealthier and highly-educated parents. It may be that some parents are speaking English at home to reinforce what is learned in the three years of kindergarten (S. Kim, Korean NRC for TIMSS, personal communication, April 11, 2013).

In Ireland, pupils who reported that they *sometimes* spoke English at home scored above the study centrepiece of 500 for reading (540) and slightly above for mathematics (518), but for science obtained a mean score of only 501. Looking at the 2% of pupils who *never* spoke English at home, their score was well below the centrepiece for science (458), below for reading (481), but almost at the centrepiece for mathematics (495). This suggests that while Irish performance in general is weakest on science, science is particularly problematic for EAL pupils in the Irish education system.

### Pupil language: parent-report

Parents were also asked whether their child spoke the language of the test prior to starting school. As parents were provided with dichotomous (*yes/no*) response options, their answers provide a slightly less nuanced view of language of the home than the reports from pupils. However, their answers are highly relevant, as they provide an indicator of pupils'



preparedness for the demands of primary school – that is, at a very basic level, being able to understand the language of instruction. Data are unavailable for England and the United States, as, in common with countries who took part in TIMSS only, the Parent Questionnaire was not administered in either country.

As with pupil reports, there is considerable variation between countries in the percentage of pupils who did not speak the test language (Table 4.5). While almost all pupils in Finland and Northern Ireland spoke the language of the test prior to starting school, this was true of only 82% in Singapore. With almost 7% of pupils not speaking the test language, Ireland was close to the PIRLS international average (8%). Thus, parent reports broadly support data from the Pupil Questionnaires, suggesting that Irish schools have an average to below average proportion of additional language pupils.

Table 4.5: Percentages of pupils described by parents as speaking the language of the test prior to starting school, and related achievement scores\*

	Spoke test language, pre-school		Mean gap (No-Yes)		
	% Yes	% No	Reading	Maths	Science
Australia	95	5	-4	+4	-11
Finland	99	1	~	~	~
Hong Kong SAR	97	3	-3	7	-6
Ireland	93	7	-39	-29	-42
New Zealand	94	6	-52	-	-
Northern Ireland	98	2	~	~	~
Russian Fed.	96	4	-31	-6	-20
Singapore	82	18	-33	-24	-36
PIRLS	92	8	-37	-34	-40

Parent questionnaire unavailable for TIMSS-only countries and for England and the United States.

\*TIMSS data available only for countries that administered both PIRLS and TIMSS to the same pupils.

A tilde (~) indicates insufficient numbers to generate reliable data.

Comparing pupil and parent reports (equating *never* with *no*), two points are of note. First, at home, pupils were less likely to speak the test language before they began school than at the time of testing. Thus, it is likely that some children who learn the test language in their school bring that language into their home. Second, the overall achievement gaps between those who did or did not speak the language of the test is considerably smaller if parent reports are used. For example, the PIRLS study average gap, based on parent reports of pre-school language, is 37 points, whereas for pupil reports of current language, it is 51 points. In Ireland, the gap on reading achievement based on reported pre-school language spoken is 39 points, compared to 75 for pupils who currently do not speak the language of the test at home. This may reflect differences in how pupils and parents interpret the questions asked. However, it may also be indicative of elevated risk of academic problems for children whose families do not incorporate the language of the school into their home.

## EAL pupils in Ireland

The previous section provided a context for the extent of additional language speakers across PT 2011. This section compares EAL pupils with native-speaking pupils in Ireland. Topics covered include the other languages typically spoken, the distribution of EAL pupils within the Irish primary school system (e.g., by DEIS status, school location), educational attainment and employment status of parents, and home and school experiences. As noted earlier, information on whether pupils spoke Irish or not was gathered as part of the Parent Questionnaire only.

## Languages spoken

As part of the Parent Questionnaire, parents in Ireland were presented with a list of languages (English, Irish, Polish, Romanian, French, and Other<sup>3</sup>) and asked to indicate which language(s) their child had spoken prior to starting primary school. In addition, parents were asked which language they and their spouse or partner spoke most frequently.

As might be expected, parents indicated that the vast majority of pupils (93%) spoke English before they started school, and English was the language most commonly spoken by mothers (92%) and fathers (91%) (Table 4.6). Five percent of pupils spoke Irish, considerably higher than the less than half a percent of parents. This may reflect attendance at naíonraí or a small number of bilingual households. Among other listed languages, Polish was by far the most commonly spoken (just over 2% of pupils, mothers and fathers). Over 7% of pupils and almost 5% of parents spoke a language other than the five listed. Further information on what these languages were is not available (although Census 2011 data would suggest that Lithuanian is prominent among them [CSO, 2012b]).

Table 4.6: Parental reports of language(s) spoken by pupils prior to starting primary school, and language currently spoken *most often* by parents

Language	% pupil	% mother	% father
English	93.4	92.1	90.8
Irish	5.2	0.4	0.3
Polish	2.2	2.3	2.0
Romanian	0.9	0.3	0.3
French	0.9	0.5	0.5
Other	7.4	4.3	4.6
Not applicable	–	0.1	1.5

Data for pupils include multiple responses and sum to more than 100%. Parent data refer to single language only.

## Where do EAL pupils attend schools?

There is some research evidence to support the popular perception that EAL children tend to be unevenly distributed across primary schools. For example, Smyth, Darmody, McGinnity and Byrne (2009) found that, at primary level, so-called newcomer pupils were more likely to be found in those schools that are urban, “disadvantaged”, large, had English as the medium of instruction, and a non-Catholic ethos. In a similar vein, Curry, Gilligan and Ward’s (2011) analyses of data from the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) study suggest that what they referred to as “non-traditional Irish” children (children where no parent is Irish-born or from any part of the UK) were slightly over-represented in urban DEIS schools. For example, 23% of “non-traditional Irish” pupils were enrolled in DEIS Urban Band 1 or 2 schools, compared to 14% of “old Irish” pupils. Data from PT 2011 offer some support for these findings.

Parental responses were combined into a family language measure. Pupils were split into those with and those without at least one English-speaking parent. These data were then related to school characteristics – specifically, to school DEIS status, urban/rural location, and to principals’ reports on the percentage of their enrolment who spoke English as their first language. In addition, teachers were asked how many pupils in their class

<sup>3</sup> As Census 2011 data had not been released when PT 2011 questionnaires were developed, the languages were chosen based on unpublished NA 2009 data about the languages pupils most frequently reported as spoken in their home.

experience difficulties with spoken English. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of pupils were in classrooms where *no* pupil had difficulty with English, but differences were evident by school location and DEIS status.

### DEIS status

EAL pupils were unevenly distributed across schools by DEIS status (Table 4.7). While 82% of pupils who said that they *always* spoke English at home were enrolled in non-DEIS schools, this fell to 65% among the admittedly quite small number of pupils who *never* spoke English at home. The pupils in the *never* group who were enrolled in DEIS schools tended to be urban-based, with less than 5% in DEIS Rural schools. As the number of pupils who *never* speak English at home is very small, Table 4.7 shows data for a combined *sometimes/never* category of pupils. Unlike the very small *never* group of pupils, the combined category is unlikely to be skewed by a small number of atypical pupils.

Table 4.7: Percentage of pupils enrolled in various categories of DEIS status schools, by frequency with which the pupil spoke English at home

Frequency	Urban Band 1	Urban Band 2	Rural	Not in DEIS
Always	8	6	4	82
Sometimes	10	12	5	73
Never	11	19	5	65
<i>Sometimes/Never</i>	10	13	5	72
Overall (IRL)	8	7	4	80

Teacher reports largely support the data collected from the pupils. Approximately half of pupils in DEIS Urban Band 1 (48%) and Band 2 (52%) schools were in classes where their teacher indicated that no pupils had difficulty with spoken English, a good deal lower than the percentage in DEIS Rural schools and non-DEIS schools (65% in both cases). Indeed, no DEIS Rural school had more than one pupil per class who had difficulty with spoken English. In contrast, 32% of pupils in DEIS Urban Band 1 schools and 48% in Urban Band 2 schools had more than one such pupil in their class. Thus, the data suggest that DEIS Urban schools have higher concentrations of pupils likely to be in need of EAL assistance.

### Location, size and gender composition

In addition to a relative overrepresentation in DEIS Urban schools, EAL pupils were more likely to be concentrated in urban areas, generally (Table 4.8). Nationally, 18% of pupils attended schools in remote rural areas, compared to only 9% of pupils who indicated that they *sometimes/never* spoke English at home.

Table 4.8: Percentage of pupils enrolled in schools in various locations, by frequency with which the pupil spoke English at home

Frequency	Urban	Suburban	Small city/ large town	Small town	Remote rural
Always	11	17	23	30	20
Sometimes	15	20	32	24	9
Never	18	16	37	22	7
<i>Sometimes/Never</i>	16	19	33	23	9
Overall (IRL)	11	17	24	29	18

Teacher reports also suggest differences in the distribution of EAL pupils by school size and location. Almost 80% of pupils in small schools had no pupils with spoken language difficulty in their classroom, compared to approximately 60% of pupils in medium-sized schools, and only half of those in large schools. Likewise, almost 80% of pupils in small town or remote rural schools were in classrooms where teachers reported that no pupils had spoken language difficulty. This dropped to 57% for pupils in medium size cities, 44% in suburban areas, and 32% in urban schools. Half (50%) of pupils in urban schools were in classrooms where more than one pupil had difficulty with the spoken language of the test.

Three-quarters (75%) of pupils who *always* spoke English at home were enrolled in mixed-sex schools, compared to 69% of those who *sometimes* and 52% of those who *never* spoke English at home. Teacher reports also suggest differences by school gender composition. Over two-thirds (68%) of pupils in mixed schools had no pupils with spoken language difficulty in their classroom, compared to 60% of pupils in all-girls schools, and only 34% of pupils in all-boys schools. In a related vein, pupils in all-boys schools were much more likely to be in a class where more than one pupil had language difficulties (58% compared to 31% in all-girls schools), with pupils in mixed schools being least likely to be in such a classroom (16%). The data for mixed sex schools may be a reflection of location – most rural schools tend to be mixed. However, reasons for the higher incidence of difficulties with spoken English in all-boys schools are less apparent. They may perhaps be attributable to a greater propensity for boys to have language difficulties (e.g., Hammer, Farkas, & Maczuga, 2010; Shriberg, Tomlin, & McSweeney, 1999), and for slightly fewer boys than girls to speak English at home (as will be described later).

### *Patronage and language of instruction*

Of the relatively few pupils in PT 2011 enrolled in schools where the patron/ethos was other than Roman Catholic, most were enrolled in schools with a Church of Ireland ethos. Thus, Table 4.9 presents data for Catholic and Church of Ireland schools separately, but combines data for other types of schools to preserve anonymity. The data partly reflect Smyth et al.'s (2009) finding that schools with a non-Catholic ethos tended to have slightly higher percentages of pupils for whom English was an additional language. At 89%, Church of Ireland schools had the highest percentage of pupils who reported *always* speaking English at home. In contrast, only 73% of pupils in schools with an “other” ethos or patronage model did so. Again, a cautionary note is needed, due to the very small numbers of “other” ethos schools. A larger sample of such schools would be needed to establish if a more diverse enrolment is a consistent feature or limited to new schools in newly built areas, most of which tend to not assume a Catholic patronage.

Table 4.9: Percentage of pupils enrolled in schools of different patronages, by frequency with which the pupil spoke English at home

Frequency	Catholic	Church of IRL	Other
Always	85	89	73
Sometimes	13	11	26
Never	2	0	1
<i>Sometimes/Never</i>	15	11	27
Overall (IRL)	93	4	3

In the case of Irish-medium schools, data from the Parent Questionnaire about the languages pupils spoke prior to starting school were substituted for the Pupil Questionnaire data used elsewhere. This was done to distinguish between pupils in Irish-medium schools

who spoke English *and* Irish at home (and who were not considered to be EAL pupils), and pupils who spoke “another” language at home. As can be seen from Table 4.10, Irish-medium schools are almost entirely devoid of EAL pupils. Just under half a percent of the enrolment of Irish-medium schools did not speak English prior to starting school, compared to 7% of pupils in English-medium schools. Parent reports are supported by data from teachers. Teachers in Irish-medium schools reported that none of their pupils had difficulty with spoken English.

Table 4.10: Percentage of pupils enrolled in English- and Irish-medium schools, by parental reports of whether the pupil spoke English or not prior to starting school

	English	Irish
Yes	93	100
No	7	<1

### EAL pupils: perceptions of clustering

This section compares principals' perceptions of the percentage of their school's enrolment that are EAL pupils with a percentage derived from parent and pupil reports. Pupils with *at least one* parent who reported that English was the language they spoke most frequently were considered to have English as their first language. Given the combination of at least one English-speaking parent and living in an anglophone country, it seems reasonable to classify such pupils as native English speakers or bilingual, as distinct from speaking English as an *additional* language. Where data from the Parent Questionnaire were missing, Pupil Questionnaire responses were used (those who *sometimes* or *never* spoke English at home were considered to be EAL pupils).

For each school, the percent of Fourth class pupils who were EAL pupils was calculated and used as a proxy for the percent of EAL pupils within their school as a whole. This was compared against principals' estimates of the percentage of their school's pupils for whom English was not their first language. This provided another measure of the extent of clustering of EAL pupils within certain schools, and allowed for a comparison of principal estimates versus parental reports.

There are slight differences between parental reports of home language and principals' perceptions of same (Table 4.11). Both principal and parent reports suggest that roughly 60% of pupils attending English-medium schools were in schools where almost all pupils (i.e., more than 90%) spoke English as their first language. However, while parent reports suggest that only 9% of pupils attended schools where fewer than three-quarters have English as their first language, principal estimates suggest that 19% of pupils are enrolled in such schools.

Table 4.11: Principal estimates and parental reports (aggregated to school level) of the percentages of pupils within a school whose first language is English

% native speaking pupils in the school	Source	
	Principal	Parent
More than 90%	61%	59%
76% to 90%	20%	32%
51% to 75%	15%	7%
26% to 50%	3%	2%
25% or less	1%	0%

Data are based on a common set of 134 schools. Schools excluded are those teaching through Irish and those for which the School Questionnaire was not returned (i.e., no principal estimates are available).

The parental data relate to the Fourth class sample only, whereas principal estimates refer to the school unit. However, it is unlikely that the overall composition of Fourth class is systematically different from the composition of the school enrolment as a whole. Also, some pupils were excluded due to limited English proficiency, and their parents did not complete a Parent Questionnaire. Again though, this does not explain the disparity as only 18 pupils (0.4%) were excluded for this reason. In a related vein, differential response rates to the Parent Questionnaire by English- versus non-English-speaking parents cannot account for the different data. First, parental response rates were high, irrespective of language of the home (for example, there was a 96% completion rate for pupils who *always* spoke English at home versus 94% for those who *sometimes* or *never* did so). Second, in the small number of cases where parental information was missing, pupil data were substituted.

Parent reports are based on a description of their own personal characteristics, while principal reports are an estimate of a school-level characteristic. On balance, it seems likely that parent reports are more accurate. It may be that principals have included in their estimates any child for whom only one parent is not an English language speaker, even if the other parent normally speaks English. Another possible explanation is that the view of EAL pupils as a “challenge” leads to a slight over-estimation of such pupils.

### **Background characteristics of EAL pupils**

There is little doubt that the home environment experienced by children – in terms of wealth, of support for academic achievement, and in the “social capital” provided – is strongly related to academic achievement (e.g., Davis-Kean, 2005; Dupéré, Leventhal, Crosnoe, & Dion, 2010). However, there is relatively little Irish research examining how the home environments of EAL pupils differ from those of native speakers. What does exist tends to examine immigrants in general, is typically based on teacher perception rather than parent or pupil reports, and tends to be qualitative and/or related to a discrete location (e.g., Devine, 2005; Smyth et al., 2009).

An exception is Curry et al.’s (2011) use of GUI data. Using data from 9-year-old cohort, they suggest that “non-traditional Irish” children tended to have fewer books in their homes, but to make greater use of school and public libraries. They also found that such pupils had higher absenteeism rates, and were marginally more likely to have experienced bullying in school but were more positive about school, generally, and about mathematics in particular, than their “traditional Irish” counterparts. Parents of non-traditional Irish pupils provided homework assistance less frequently, and typically were well educated but not well paid. Thornton, Darmody and McCoy (in press) – using the same GUI dataset – also found that 9-year-olds whose mother was not a native English or Irish speaker were nine times more likely to have a poor attendance record, whereas children whose mothers were “immigrants” (defined as born outside of Ireland) had few attendance problems.

Although largely focused on psychological well-being, Fanning, Haase and O’Boyle’s (2011) study is also relevant, as they speculated that the relatively high levels of well-being among a sample of immigrant children in Dublin was attributable to the comparatively high levels of parental education (and associated additional cultural and social capital). More generally, they noted the atypical pattern, whereby “Ireland is in a somewhat extreme position in that immigrant educational advantage over the native population is quite large” (p. 174). This concurs with Curry et al.’s findings, and suggests that research from other countries on the home and educational experiences of migrant children might not apply so well here. As such, the (albeit quite limited) data from PT 2011 are particularly welcome.

### EAL pupils' parents

A small amount of information about the characteristics of parents of EAL pupils can be gleaned from the Parent Questionnaire. Both mothers and fathers of EAL pupils tend to be well educated (Table 4.12). For example, 30% of mothers and 28% of fathers have been educated to at least degree level, slightly higher than the 23% of mothers and 22% of fathers of native-speaking pupils. However, at the other end of the spectrum, a slightly higher percentage of parents of EAL pupils than of native speakers had no educational qualifications.

Table 4.12: Paternal and maternal educational attainment, by whether pupil is classified as EAL or native\* speaker

Highest level completed	Father		Mother	
	% Native	% EAL	% Native	% EAL
None	<1	<1	<1	1
Some primary/post-primary	9	14	5	11
Junior Cert. or equivalent	20	7	13	5
Leaving Cert. or equivalent	19	19	19	18
PLC or equivalent	12	10	14	11
Third-level cert. or diploma	17	19	25	21
Degree	13	15	15	20
Postgraduate degree	9	13	8	10
N/A	2	4	<1	3

\*"Native" defined as at least one English- or Irish-speaking parent, or, if parent data are missing, by "always" speak language of test at home.

EAL pupils were slightly less likely to have a parent in employment than were native speaking pupils (Table 4.13). While the fathers of 73% of native speakers were in full-time employment, this was true of only 59% of EAL pupils' fathers. Maternal full-time employment rates were reasonably similar (29% for mothers of native speaking pupils, versus 33% for mothers of EAL pupils), but a larger percentage of mothers of native speakers were in part-time employment (32% versus 20%, respectively).

Table 4.13: Paternal and maternal employment status, by whether pupil is classified as EAL or native\* speaker

	Father		Mother	
	% Native	% EAL	% Native	% EAL
Full-time	73	59	29	33
Part-time	6	12	32	20
No paid work	7	9	18	20
Other	9	12	12	17
N/A	5	7	9	11

\*"Native" defined as at least one English- or Irish-speaking parent, or, if parent data are missing, by "always" speak language of test at home.

The Parent Questionnaire asked parents a series of questions about their child's school, and their views on inclusivity, safety and pastoral care. Parental responses in general are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 (Eivers & Creaven, 2013). In the context of the present chapter, some positive findings emerged. As shown in Table 4.14, there was little difference between parents of EAL and of English-speaking pupils on how they rated their

child's school on inclusivity, safety and pastoral care. Almost all parents either *agreed a lot* or *agreed a little* that their child's school included them in their child's education, provided a safe environment, and cared about their child's progress in school.

Table 4.14: Percentage of pupils whose parents *agreed a lot* or *agreed a little* that the school included them, was a safe environment, and cared about their child's progress, by frequency with which the pupil spoke English at home

	School includes me	School is a safe environment	School cares about progress
Always	92	98	99
Sometimes	92	97	97
Never	88	97	97
<i>Sometimes/Never</i>	91	97	97
Overall (IRL)	92	98	98

Similar to the findings of Curry et al.'s (2011) analyses of GUI data, parents of EAL pupils were slightly less likely to help their children with schoolwork (Table 4.15). For example, only slightly more than half of pupils who *sometimes* or *never* spoke English at home received daily or near daily help with either reading or maths. In contrast, among pupils who *always* spoke English at home, 59% received almost daily help with reading and 58% received daily or almost daily help with mathematics. Pupils who *sometimes* or *never* spoke English at home received general help with homework less regularly than those who *always* spoke English at home, with the difference most pronounced for the small number of pupils in the *never* group (less than half received daily or near daily help). While almost all parents reported ensuring time was set aside for homework, it was slightly less common among parents whose child *sometimes* or *never* spoke English at home (89% versus 96% among those who *always* spoke English).

Table 4.15: Percentages of pupils whose parents engage in various homework-related activities with them on a daily or near daily basis, by frequency with which the pupil spoke English at home

	Help practise reading	Help practise maths skills	Help with homework	Ensure time for homework
Always	59	58	70	96
Sometimes	53	54	62	90
Never	40	38	46	80
<i>Sometimes/Never</i>	51	52	60	89
Overall (IRL)	58	57	69	95

However, two broader patterns are worth noting. First, in most countries in PT 2011, parents of additional language pupils tended to be slightly less involved in homework than parents of native-speaking pupils. Second, as discussed in Chapter 6 (Eivers & Creaven, 2013), parents in Ireland generally displayed higher levels of involvement in their child's homework than did parents in other countries. Thus, even though only 60% of EAL pupils in Ireland received almost daily help with homework, this was higher than the overall international average of 55% (i.e., including native and additional language pupils) across all PIRLS countries.



### EAL pupil characteristics

The small numbers of pupils who *never* spoke English at home were older than other pupils (10.6 years of age versus an overall Irish average of 10.3 years) (Table 4.16). Although one might expect equal numbers of boys and girls among EAL pupils, in Ireland, slightly more boys (3%) than girls (only 1.6%) reported *never* speaking English at home.<sup>4</sup> Most pupils had attended pre-school, but attendance was less common among the *sometimes/never* group of pupils than among those who *always* spoke English at home (77% versus 90%, respectively). In addition to lower likelihood of pre-school attendance, EAL pupils tended not to enrol in school at as early an age as native speaking pupils. Whereas almost all (98%) of pupils in the *always* group had started school no later than age 5, only 77% of those in the *sometimes/never* group (and only 54% of pupils who *never* spoke English at home) had done so.

Table 4.16: Pupil age, sex and early educational experiences, by frequency with which the pupil spoke English at home

	Current age	%			
		Girls	Boys	Attended pre-school	Started school at 5 or younger
Always	10.3 yrs	85%	84%	90%	98%
Sometimes	10.3 yrs	13%	13%	79%	80%
Never	10.6 yrs	2%	3%	65%	54%
<i>Sometimes/Never</i>	10.4 yrs	15%	16%	77%	77%
Overall (IRL)	10.3 yrs	49%	51%	88%	95%

In terms of resources – educational and otherwise – found in the home, EAL and English-speaking pupils were quite similar. Almost all pupils (96%) had a computer in their home, while a sizeable minority – especially among EAL pupils – had a computer in their bedroom (Table 4.17). Just over half of pupils in each category had a TV in their bedroom (ranging only from 53% of pupils in the *always* category to 56% of pupils in the *never* category). However, only 75% of pupils who *always* spoke English at home reported that they had a study desk or table, compared to 81% of pupils who *sometimes/never* spoke English at home. Of all the resources listed, pupils were least likely to own an iPhone (13%), but ownership was higher among pupils in the *sometimes/never* group (18%) and highest in the *never* group (28%).

Table 4.17: Percentages of pupils reporting which of a variety of resources they had in their own home, by frequency with which the pupil spoke English at home

	Computer	Study desk	TV in bedroom	Computer in bedroom	iPhone
Always	96	75	53	18	12
Sometimes	96	81	55	28	17
Never	91	86	56	31	28
<i>Sometimes/Never</i>	95	81	55	28	18
Overall (IRL)	96	76	54	19	13

<sup>4</sup> Similar slight gender differences were apparent also in the PIRLS and TIMSS study averages. For example, in PIRLS, 4% of girls and 6% of boys in all participating countries reported *never* speaking the language of the test at home.

As outlined in Chapter 3 (Clerkin & Creaven, 2013), pupils were asked a number of questions about their enjoyment of reading, mathematics, and science, and their responses were combined to create three overall “liking” scales (with pupils divided into the categories of *like*, *somewhat like* and *don’t like*). While Irish pupils generally held more positive attitudes towards reading than their peers in other countries, the (small number of) pupils who *never* spoke English at home were not so positive (Table 4.18). Only 21% were categorised as liking reading, compared to an Irish average of 37%. However, for mathematics and science, roughly similar percentages of EAL and English-speaking pupils were categorised as *liking* the subjects.

Table 4.18: Percentages of pupils categorised as liking reading, mathematics and science, by frequency with which the pupil spoke English at home

	Reading	Maths	Science
Always	37	40	59
Sometimes	38	45	64
Never	21	42	52
<i>Sometimes/Never</i>	35	45	62
Overall (IRL)	37	41	59

As well as attitudes to the three academic domains, pupils were asked how they felt about school, more generally (Table 4.19). Nationally, 74% agreed that they liked school, but only 65% of pupils in the *never* group did, somewhat counterbalancing the 81% agreement from those who *sometimes* spoke English at home. Pupils in the *never* category were also less likely to indicate that they felt they belonged in school (only 65% agreed). However, it is worth remembering again that the number of pupils in the *never* group is very small. The combined *sometimes/never* category is considerably larger and more reliable. Taking this group of pupils into consideration, 79% agreed that they felt they belonged in school, just below the 83% of pupils who *always* spoke English. A large majority of pupils (ranging from 79% of the *never* group to 91% of the *always* and *sometimes* groups) agreed that they felt safe in school.

Table 4.19: Percentages of pupils who agreed *a little* or *a lot* that they liked school, felt safe there, and felt they belonged there, by frequency with which the pupil spoke English at home

	I like being in school	I feel safe at school	I belong at school
Always	73	91	83
Sometimes	81	91	82
Never	65	79	65
<i>Sometimes/Never</i>	78	89	79
Overall (IRL)	74	91	82

Pupils were asked how frequently (if at all) they experienced each of six types of bullying behaviour while in school. Behaviours listed included being made fun of or being forced to do something. Bullying is dealt with comprehensively in Chapter 3 of this volume (Clerkin & Creaven, 2013). However, some of their main findings relating to EAL pupils are also worth noting here. Pupils who *always* spoke English at home were less likely to be bullied than those who *sometimes* or *never* did so. EAL pupils experienced each of the six bullying behaviours more frequently than their non-EAL counterparts. In particular, EAL pupils were about twice as likely as native speakers to experience regular exclusion from games and or to have something stolen from them.

## Discussion

PT 2011 revealed some interesting information about children who are not fluent in the language of instruction in their primary school classroom. One key finding is that Irish classrooms contain fewer such children than classrooms in most other participating countries. While there was a rapid increase in the number of EAL pupils in Irish schools over a relatively short time period, our classrooms remain less linguistically diverse than classrooms in most countries. This is perhaps in contrast to popular perception. There is also a slight divergence between principals' perceptions of the percentage of EAL pupils in their own school and what parents tell us. Information from principals suggest that in a sizeable number of our schools, English speakers comprise no more than three-quarters of the enrolment, while parent reports suggest this is true only of a smaller number of schools.

Pupils whose home and school languages differed performed less well on the reading, mathematics and science assessments. In Ireland, although EAL pupils were outperformed by native speakers on all three domains, pupils who *sometimes* spoke English at home scored well above the study centrepoint of 500 for reading and mathematics. However, while the science assessment was – in general – the area on which Irish pupils displayed the weakest performance, performance was particularly poor for EAL pupils.

In countries where relatively few pupils spoke a language that differed from the language of the test, achievement gaps tended to be very large. That aside, in some countries, pupils who spoke a language that differed from the language of the test obtained mean scores that were not only well above the centrepoint of 500 but also above national means for many other countries. For example, pupils in Singapore and the Russian Federation who *never* spoke the language of the test at home achieved higher scores on the mathematics and science assessments than Ireland's overall national mean.

In Ireland, as in most countries, the achievement gap is larger if current language spoken, rather than language spoken prior to starting school, is examined. It may be that pupils who do not “bring home” the language of the school, and whose home language environment is unrelated to their school language environment are at an elevated risk of academic difficulties. The elevated risk may be compounded by the lower likelihood of parental assistance with homework in EAL households. This may be partly attributable to some EAL parents feeling that they lack the requisite skills, but may also be cultural. As discussed in Chapter 6 (Eivers & Creaven, 2013), homework is an almost universal feature of school life in Ireland, and parents in Ireland were above average in the frequency with which they monitor and support homework. However, in some countries, homework is not so frequently given, nor is it accorded such importance. Thus, it may be useful to draw teachers' attention to cultural differences in attitudes to homework, and to note that some otherwise enthusiastic parents may not engage with homework in the manner expected.

In Ireland, the data revealed evidence of clustering of EAL pupils in certain types of school. Specifically, EAL pupils were more likely to be found in schools with a non-Catholic /Church of Ireland ethos, in urban schools generally, and in DEIS Urban schools in particular. This may be because immigrant families tend to settle in less affluent urban areas, or because some school admission policies can inadvertently exclude recent arrivals to an area. While this chapter was being written, Minister Quinn announced changes to admission policies in Irish schools (Quinn, 2013). One of his stated aims was to stop children who come to Ireland from other countries from being excluded from more popular or over-subscribed schools. When enacted, it will be interesting to see what effects the changes have on how EAL pupils are clustered in primary schools.

The data revealed many positive findings about EAL pupils in Ireland. First, their parents almost universally agreed that their child's school provided a safe environment and

cared about their child's progress. Second, the pupils themselves tended to have a positive attitude to learning, and were broadly similar to their English-speaking counterparts in the extent to which they liked reading, mathematics and science. However, the (admittedly very small number of) pupils who *never* spoke English at home were less likely than the average to agree that they liked being in school, felt safe there or felt they belonged there. Further, EAL pupils were more likely than English-speaking pupils to have experienced bullying in school. These data suggest that while most schools have successfully included EAL pupils and their parents in the broad school community, some problems remain, particularly regarding pupils' interaction with each other.

The information presented in this chapter represents only a broad description of some of the characteristics and experiences of EAL pupils in Ireland. The PT 2011 data are useful in that they allow for comparison with many other countries, but the breadth of the studies militates against depth. Questions addressed here are those applicable in all countries, rather than those directed at the particular (and many) gaps that exist in Irish data on EAL pupils. It would be of interest to follow up on some of the results reported here, but with a wider variety of schools and with much more information collected from the pupils and their teachers.

## Additional references



This section does not repeat the core references already listed in Chapter 1. These include the three international reports on PT 2011 and the Irish national report and those related to other key studies such as National Assessments and PISA.

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