

How to...

Raise levels of achievement using Somali language

This guidance has been developed as part of 'Our Languages', a DCSF funded initiative to promote the teaching of community languages in mainstream and supplementary or complementary schools.

It is intended to help schools develop good practice in teaching and learning and to provide practical ideas for extending current provision. The guidance also offers suggestions for partnership working between mainstream and supplementary schools. You will also find links to support organisations, websites and government departments.

'Our Languages' is a consortium of four organisations:

CILT – the National Centre for Languages
The National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education at ContinYou
The School Development and Support Agency (SDSA)
The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT)

This guide will be of interest to you if

- You are a community language school
- You are appointing a community language teacher
- You are interested bridging a strong bond between a supplementary school, a mainstream school, pupils and parents
- You are interested in how a community language school provides appropriate support and engagement, and builds good working relationships with other community language schools, mainstream schools and the local authority
- You would like to foster relationships with organisations that encourage the concept of bilingualism
- You would like to develop parental support, volunteering, and other opportunities

Context

Aayatiin Foundation was established in 2005 to contribute to the attainment of the vulnerable Somali community living in southwest London. The foundation successfully runs study support, homework clubs, community language support and youth development initiatives for 6-16 years old students. The main objectives are to:

- Provide study support in order to improve the level of achievement
- Provide homework clubs and mentoring programmes in both secondary and primary schools
- Promote Somali language teaching
- Promote community cohesion
- Celebrate pupil achievement
- Organise regular consultation, social and educational meetings, which bring the Somali community, BME communities, residents, wider public, local authority and national bodies together to discuss ways of improving community commission.

Why we wanted to address this issue

Aayatiin aims to become a lead Somali community language centre that promotes Somali language, shares best practice, identifies challenges and explores opportunities. We work with various local mainstream organisations including schools, local authorities and other partner agencies that focus on education and community languages. We are also developing models that will allow supplementary schools and mainstream schools work more closely together.

Some work has initially started where four supplementary schools have come to work partnership with mainstream schools, Lambeth Academy and local authority. We have set up a series of focus groups comprising students, parents and community leaders to establish Somali language, build morale and confidence and, raise self-esteem and motivations. In order to improve our services, our school is now following the Quality Framework for supplementary schools devised by ContinYou.

What we did

The foundation initially concentrated on providing study support, homework clubs and youth development initiatives using community languages for 6-16 years old students. After many parents made enquiries, we started teaching Somali language. There was a huge response from the community. Initially, learners and their parents were invited to an introductory session to explain the plans, as a result of which a core group agreed to attend the community language supplementary school. We get some funding from the local authority. Our management team, which includes parents and volunteers, lead the project. Feedback is obtained from learners, parents, teachers and volunteers and from responses to questionnaires.

Qualified teachers in Somali with some further training in the United Kingdom provide one day each week to support Somali speaking students. This helps to support both those who have enough knowledge to prepare for exams and those who have little knowledge to maintain their own language and cultural identity within the community.

Evidence of success

- Our consultation exercise, based on feedback forms from pupils, tutors, volunteers, parents and the management committee showed a high level of satisfaction
- Termly evaluations demonstrated sound progression in community language learning
- Our management team constantly monitors and holds discussions sessions with learners, tutors, volunteers and parents
- Retention rates are good
- We also measure success by observing teaching and classroom management skills, work-sampling and evaluating teaching resources.

The lessons we learned

- The activity can build confidence and motivation towards Somali language and culture as a whole
- Interaction between children themselves has a positive impact on building their confidence and motivation
- It is possible to build the confidence of parents who had previously been unwilling to send their children for support

- It is important to give parents ownership the services delivered within a community space which they have a stake..

Top tips

- Send bilingual letters through pupils' bags
- Hold open evenings
- Encourage after school club visits
- Hold outreach work in community centres
- Encourage parent to parent discussion
- Have a clear understanding of and respect parents' roles
- Engage parents positively and be consistent in your approach
- Hold consultations and give regular feedback
- Create and make use of parent ambassadors
- Ideally, the community language teacher should understand the education systems of both Britain and the home country

Links

CILT, the National Centre for Languages -<http://www.cilt.org.uk/>