

# Sandwell Language Provision in Public Health

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## Need for Language Services

88% of Sandwell residents speak English as their main language, compared to 92.3% nationally. This proportion varies by ward, and in five wards less than 80% of residents speak English as their main language. This disparity between local and national figures may also be exacerbated by the level of reading proficiency. The data potentially underestimates language barriers since an understanding of verbal English does not necessarily correlate to English reading competency.

Health literature is not readily translated and available in multiple languages, other than in some cases for professionals. More work is needed to ensure this information can be shared locally and that the information is in an easily understandable format for the public. It is essential that all communities can make health decisions for themselves based on information that is available to them, if they do not know what they should be doing or what services are available, how can we expect people to make healthier life choices? Furthermore, if information is not available in community languages then it is difficult to ensure the quality of information being received e.g., consider Covid 19 and the associated infodemic (when too much information was available with disinformation embedded) which led to significant vaccine hesitancy amongst the Black, Asian and Other Minority (BAME) communities.

The Covid19 community champions project was an enormous success enabling local groups and leaders to engage with their community in different languages and buffer the influence of disinformation. Due to funding provisions, it created opportunities to translate guidance and promote health messages in a range of communicative styles. The groups involved were already known to a lot of communities and therefore a recognisable and trusted face alongside information in their main language helped public understanding a fast-changing health challenge. It would be great to now replicate this with other health messages and provide videos in multiple languages to disseminate information.

When completing service referrals, just translating the referral does not solve the problem since, any referral or signposting route the service user agrees to may not have the same translation services present as the initial referring service. If language is still a barrier further along the referral chain, it can potentially discourage attendance both to the current service and future suggested services. Work has been completed historically that has ensured the referral and even app-based help is translated, but effort is negated when the professional they are referred to only speaks English. It is important to invest in all aspects of the process to give the user continuity and not discourage them from accessing any help they might need.

## Data

### Main Languages Spoken in Sandwell

<b>Top 10 Main languages</b>		
All usual residents aged 3 years and over	328,751	
<b>Main language</b>	<b>Number of people</b>	<b>%</b>
English (English or Welsh in Wales)	274,709	83.6%
South Asian language: Panjabi	20,984	6.4%
Other European language (EU): Polish	5,685	1.7%
South Asian language: Bengali (with Sylheti and Chatgaya)	3,313	1.0%

South Asian language: Urdu	3,146	1.0%
Other European language (EU): Romanian	2,394	0.7%
West or Central Asian language: Kurdish	1,423	0.4%
South Asian language: Pakistani Pahari (with Mirpuri and Potwari)	1,158	0.4%
Arabic	1,081	0.3%
West or Central Asian language: Persian or Farsi	992	0.3%

Source: ONS 2021 Census

By focusing on the top four languages after English; Panjabi, Polish, Bengali and Urdu we could reach an extra 10.1% of our population in Sandwell.

## Proficiency in English

Proficiency in English	Number of People	%
All usual residents aged 3 years and over whose main language is not English	54,039	100.0%
Main language is not English: Can speak English very well	17,226	31.9%
Main language is not English: Can speak English well	20,420	37.8%
Main language is not English: Cannot speak English well	13,420	24.8%
Main language is not English: Cannot speak English	2,973	5.5%

Source: ONS 2021 Census

30.3% cannot speak English well or cannot speak English at all.

## Literacy Levels

In England and Northern Ireland, around 5.8 million (16%) of people score at the lowest level of proficiency in literacy. This is estimated to cost the UK £81 billion a year in lost earnings and increased welfare spending.

In 2017, a literacy score as a measure of literacy vulnerability was created in co-ordination between the National Literacy Trust and Experian. At that time, three Sandwell wards were identified as being in the top 50 electoral wards with the greatest literacy need; these areas being West Bromwich West, West Bromwich East, and Warley.

More recent data has shown a worsening situation for the literacy levels of our residents. Data released by the Learning and Work Institute in June 2022 shows Sandwell has the lowest literacy levels compared to other Local Authorities in the West Midlands area.

Local Authority	% of people with essential skills needs	People with essential skills needs
Sandwell	25.7	52,401
Wolverhampton	24.9	30,578
Dudley	24.2	46,044

Birmingham	24.0	175,700
Walsall	23.7	40,730

It also shows Sandwell to have one of the lowest literacy levels in England.

Data taken from <https://learningandwork.org.uk/news-and-policy/literacy-numeracy-england-map/>  
 In 2021, almost 30% of Sandwell residents aged 16 and over (28.9%, 76,840) reported having no qualifications. This is much higher than the England and Wales figure of 18.2%.  
 Around 1 in 5 (22.7%) Sandwell residents aged 16 years and over had Level 4 or above qualifications (for example, Higher National Certificate, Higher National Diploma, Bachelor’s degree, and post-graduate qualifications). This compares with 33.8% in England and Wales showing Sandwell resident achievement at this level to be 11.1% less than national figures.

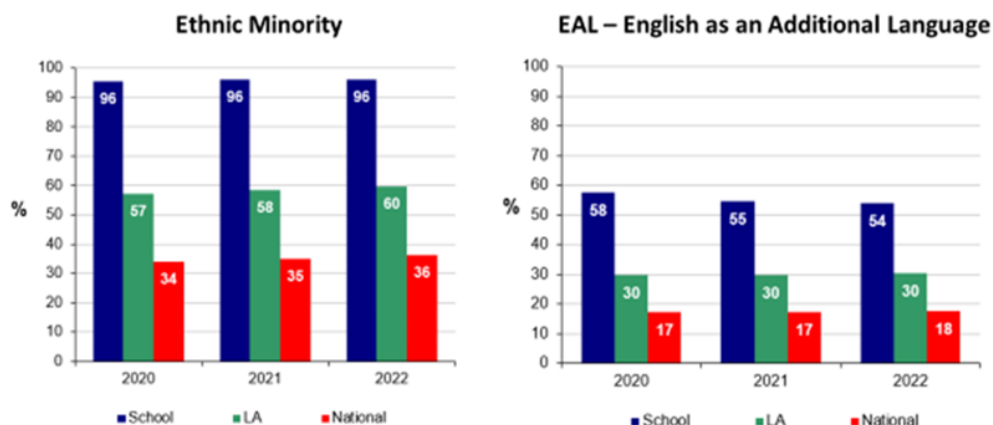
Qualifications					
	Sandwell		Black Country	West Midlands Conurbation	England and Wales
	Number	%	%	%	%
Qualifications at degree levels or higher	60316	22.7	24.3	28.1	33.8
No Qualifications	76839	28.9	25.9	23.7	18.2

Data from the 2021 census shows that Sandwell has fewer numbers of residents with qualifications at degree level or higher and higher numbers with no qualifications when comparing to the Black Country, the West Midlands Conurbation, and England and Wales.

## School Census Data

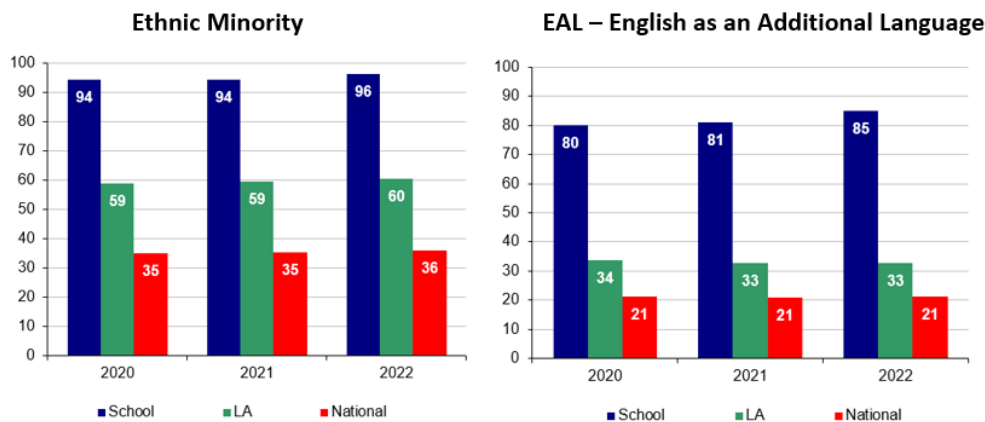
Our school census provides twice yearly data on children and young people. January 2022 Census identified that 60% of pupils in secondary schools are from Ethnic Minority Communities (EMC) compared to 36% nationally. In secondary schools 30% of our Young People identify English as an additional language (EAL) compared to 18% nationally. The graphs below show the secondary and primary schools with the highest percentage of pupils with EAL.

### Sandwell Secondary School Census Data July 2022



Sandwell School Census Data July 2022 – Holly Lodge School

## Sandwell Primary School Census Data January 2022



Sandwell School Census Data January 2022 – Devonshire Primary School

To help parents support their children with school activities, such as reading and homework, we need to work with schools to offer appropriate community language learning for parents. By supporting schools to produce parents resources in an appropriate format and literacy level to enable parents with EAL to better engage with their school community and support their child's learning.

### Current English Language Provision

For physical and mental health being able to communicate through common language is one of the most important things. Learning English creates opportunities for talking with neighbours, joining local activities, and navigating health care provision. It gives some of the most vulnerable residents greater confidence, and better access to healthcare and education. In turn, this allows people to have better health outcomes, better qualifications, and employability. Evidence shows that language barriers can negatively impact peoples' understanding, access, and use of health services. The pandemic shone a light on the impact of the intersectionality of race, language, and deprivation on health. COVID-19 worsened health inequalities and had a disproportionate impact on people from Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities (BAME). Recommendations from the PHE "Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME communities" were to:

- Improve access, experiences and outcomes of NHS, local government and integrated care systems commissioned services by BAME communities and,
- Accelerate culturally competent health promotion and disease prevention programmes

The council offer interpretation and translation services to support our residents to access services and provision. We need to better understand how these this provision is accessed by our residents who have EAL across our services and how much this costs the council. We also need to review how many of our services include interpreting and offer translated resources to promote inclusive services and activities.

## Sandwell Language Network (SLN)

To achieve [Sandwell's Vision 2030](#) "*that Sandwell is a thriving, optimistic and resilient community*" ([Big Plans for a Great Place, The Sandwell Plan 2021-2025](#)) Public Health continue our work to improve the health and wellbeing of our migrant and Ethnic Minority Communities. Sandwell Language Network (SLN) provides a programme of free, community-based English language learning and aims to improve health literacy and tackle health inequalities. *In a survey of 239 people who used the SLN, approximately 9 out of 10 said that it had helped them make NHS appointments and better explain their health concerns to their healthcare professional.*

SLN was designed to fill a gap of limited provision of ESOL for people who cannot speak English or cannot speak English well. SLN delivers informal community-based English classes using a hub and spoke model co-ordinated by [Sandwell Consortium CIC](#) (hub) and 16 local delivery partners (spokes). Sandwell Consortium is a voluntary sector consortium of established EMC organisations, based at the heart of the neighbourhoods they serve.

### **SLN Health-related Objectives**

- Improve health literacy and access to healthcare services
- Reduce social isolation and promote better mental health
- Reduce health inequalities for migrant and ethnic minority communities

## Sandwell Language Network Partnership (SLNP)

The SLNP is chaired by Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) with the Council's Public Health team, Employment Skills Team, Sandwell Adult Family Learning (SAFL) working in partnership with Sandwell College. The programme was co-designed to be delivered in partnership with local community voluntary organisations (CVO) ensuring provision is inclusive to multilingual, multicultural, and multi-faith populations. SLNP successfully secured £381,005 from the Controlling Migration Fund to deliver SLN 2020-22. Due to the demonstrable impact of SLN on improving health outcomes, SLN secured funding from the Sandwell Health and Care Partnership for 2022-24. This will strengthen the healthcare component of SLN and gives further opportunity to build resilient healthier communities in Sandwell.

## Key aims and calls to action

For services in Sandwell to be accessible to more people it is essential that there is provision available for those who do not speak English as their main language. We need to update our current directories and communications to inform the public which languages are provided at service sessions. We also need to increase staff awareness internally in public health as well as in our commissioned and grant-funded public health services.

As a call to action, we would like the team to buy into the aims set out below.

Aims:

- Agree on language policy for all public health information
- Agree on language policy for all public health service delivery
- Training for the Public Health team on health literacy and English as an additional language need
- Map all existing language provision in Sandwell public health services

## Timeline

Date	Task
<b>October 2022 - January 2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop project document</li><li>• Meet with procurement and communications council teams to discuss options</li><li>• Consult with relevant community groups</li></ul>
<b>February - March 2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Present project to senior management team</li><li>• Lunch and Learn session for Public Health Staff</li></ul>

## Action Plan

- Update Healthy Sandwell website
- Continue to promote Sandwell Language Network
- Audit in 3 months to check position, training and documents (September/October, to give chance to be added into appraisals)
- Arrange training for Public Health department
- Include Plain English Guidance, Communications Guide and Health Literacy Training in new starters pack
- Health Literacy training that is relevant to community organisations