

Next steps for language curriculum development in England: Engaging with the CAR 2025 Final Report and the DFE Response

Coalition for Language Education

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January 2026

1. Introduction

In November 2025, the Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR) published its [final report](#) on the reform of education 5-19 in England, and the government's Department for Education (DFE) [responded](#). Both stress the ambition "for every child and young person to receive a rich and broad, and inclusive and innovative education", and they acknowledge that many aspects of education are not working well. But how far and in what ways do the positions articulated in these two documents succeed in addressing the pressing concerns of teachers and experts in language education?

The [Coalition for Language Education](#) identified a high level of consensus on the priorities for language education in its collaborative analysis of 19 submissions to CAR from expert organisations specialising in language education,¹ each of them drawing on a wealth of research and/or professional experience (see [CLE/CLIE 2025](#)). This provides a strong base for the following stocktaking, which

- a) recognises a number of important advances proposed in the CAR Report & DFE Response, but also
- b) points to significant gaps and limitations, where a sharper focus is required, sometimes urgently.

The Government plans to revise the national curriculum by spring 2027 (DFE p.52), while the CAR Report insists that beyond this, it is also vital for schools and colleges to be able to innovate flexibly according to local needs (p.5). The following sketch of eight broad areas is relevant to both.

2. Building on language diversity

- a) *Significant advances*: The CAR and Government agree that "the national curriculum and the resources that support it, should reflect our modern society and diverse communities. Our aim is for the curriculum to be both a mirror, in which every child can see themselves and their communities reflected, and a window through which every child is connected to the world beyond their existing horizons and perspectives" (DFE Response p.14).
- b) *What is still needed*: The DFE Response only illustrates this objective with examples from history and geography. Language is also *crucial*, and if this 'mirror/window' is to operate as desired, there needs to be a much fuller and more explicit recognition of linguistic

¹ We were partnered in this overview by the [Committee for Linguistics in Education](#), which also posted it [here](#). The 19 submissions were produced by subject associations covering English (NATE, EA), literacy (UKLA), EAL (English as an additional language at school: NALDIC), ESOL (English for adult speakers of other languages: NATECLA), Home, Heritage & Community languages (HHCLs; ALL, NATECLA), Modern Languages (ALL, BGA, L@MFL, UCFL), Classics (TCA), and bodies with a wide cross-curricular brief for languages (AQA, BC, BA, CIOL, CLE, CLIE, NALA, TBF, WoLLoW). All these submissions can be found at <https://clie.org.uk/2024-ca-review/#submissions>

diversity both in local communities and in the wider world. Submissions to the 2024 curriculum consultation process produced strong evidence of the educational and social significance of contemporary multilingualism in England (CLE/CLIE §3), and a renewed curriculum should tune positively to the actual linguistic diversity and multilingualism of young people at all levels of education. This needs to be explicitly and systematically acknowledged in revised subject curricula for all the “headline” languages (English/French/German/ Spanish/HHCLs). Similarly, while Standard English is a major element in the repertoire of styles, varieties and languages that young people develop in education, it has to be understood alongside the other languages and vernaculars experienced in (and beyond) everyday life (CLE/CLIE §5.1, §6.1).

3. Knowledge about language

- a) *Significant advances:* Both CAR and DFE recognise that education now needs to attend to “the features and use of language as a form of communication” (CAR 2025:76; DFE 2025:30-31), and that this should include analysis of “emotive language”, “multi-modal” and “transient texts”, “an understanding of which is essential for navigating the contemporary world” (CAR p.76).
- b) *What is still needed:* This advance is largely confined to Key Stage 4 English and a reformed English Language GCSE. In contrast, there is longstanding and widespread experience of successful language awareness work at much earlier stages, as well a strong commitment to explicit discussion of linguistic form and language use in curriculum areas such as modern languages (CLE/CLIE §4.5, §5.1). In addition, to navigate the contemporary world, young peoples’ analytical understanding of language will necessarily also extend to the social dimensions of language variation, addressing Standard English ideology, sociolinguistic stratification, and multilingualism more generally (CLE/CLIE §6.1, §6.2).

4. Oracy

- a) *Significant advances:* In line with a range of 2024 consultation submissions ([CLE/CLIE](#) §4.2, §5.1, §5.2), both the CAR Report and the DFE Response give high priority to the development of spoken language. According to DFE, “expressing oneself fluently and communicating well is crucial for life and work, and an important vehicle for social justice” (p.26), and the government promises a new oracy framework that will embed it, alongside literacy and numeracy, “right across the curriculum” (DFE Response pp.10,13).
- b) *What is still needed:* It is vital that proposed oracy frameworks for both primary and secondary levels take explicit account of linguistic diversity and multilingualism, supporting young people to draw on all of their linguistic resources to develop a variety of spoken language practices and a strong personal linguistic identity, accommodating and respecting those of others at the same time (CLE/CLIE §4.2). Fluency is seriously inhibited by narrow language stereotypes and linguistic prejudice.

5. Media literacy, digital literacy and AI

- a) *Significant advances:* The CAR Report and Government Response place considerable emphasis on the development of media literacy, digital literacy and Artificial Intelligence. Language analysis is seen as relevant to media literacy (CAR p.40; DFE pp.24,31); AI may be able to support the languages curriculum (DFE p.33); and there is some awareness that a step change in the educational uses of digital technologies may be coming (CAR p.168)(compare CLE/CLIE §4.5, §9.3).
- b) *What is still needed:* Both the Report and Response see the Computing curriculum as central to an understanding of AI and digital technology (CAR p.38; DFE 24), viewing these much more as technical tools than as language technologies. But the use of AI is a communicative and sociolinguistic activity, and competencies such as prompting, evaluating AI-generated text, recognising genre and register, seeing how AI constructs meaning are all linguistic. AI systems generate, interpret and evaluate language, and they do so in ways that reflect particular norms and biases within the language data they were trained on. Dialects, accents and multilingual input are handled unevenly, and students need to be aware of how AI interprets their linguistic identities, recognising bias in AI outputs. To understand AI and digital technology, students need to develop their knowledge about language (see 2b above).

6. English as an additional language and English for speakers of other languages

- a) *Significant advances:* The Report and Response pay welcome attention to the needs of children with special educational needs (SEND), and acknowledge the importance of the early years for language and literacy development for all children, with many recommendations for systematic support.
- b) *What is still needed:* More than 20% of the school and college population have English as an additional language ([Gov.UK 2025](#)); EAL features in two of the questions in CAR's 2024 [Call for Evidence](#) (Q21 & Q38); and it is addressed in 14 of the 19 submissions analysed by CLE/CLIE. But neither CAR's Final Report nor the DFE Response mentions EAL, and there is only one passing reference to ESOL for 16-19 year olds (in CAR p.157). In contrast, as of November 2025, Ofsted's inspection toolkit recommends all schools to develop explicit EAL policies, including assessment of progress and recognition of first languages ([Ofsted 2025](#) p.20) (as already happens for [EAL](#) and [ESOL](#) in Wales). Curriculum revision needs to incorporate these expectations and develop systematic support for EAL and ESOL delivery, e.g. by making this a responsibility of the [Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence](#) (RISE) hubs and all other literacy support initiatives.

7. Languages other than English

- a) *Significant advances:* The CAR and DFE align with consultation submissions in several areas: in the decision to continue offering children the opportunity to learn a language other than English in the primary phase; in the proposal to “define core content” for at least some languages; in the intention to improve liaison between KS2 and KS3; in the interest in developing intermediate qualifications in languages (similar to the former

Asset Languages scheme); and in encouraging closer attention to the “local context and priorities” (CAR p.91; DFE p.33).

b) *What is still needed:* Intercultural understanding is a vital part of education in languages other than English but it is neglected in the CAR and DFE discussions (contrast CLE/CLIE §2.5, §2.7, §8.2). They both also focus exclusively on French/German/Spanish,² the only languages referred to at primary level and included in the current GCSE reform. Neither document mentions Home Heritage and Community Languages (HHCLs), despite reference to them in 12 of the 19 consultation submissions analysed in CLE/CLIE 2025. Active links between school language departments and HHCL programmes, between mainstream and community/ complementary schools, can both widen the language offer and strengthen schools’ local engagement; intermediate qualifications should be developed for a much fuller range of languages; and the curriculum revisions should consider general content specifications applicable to all languages of local importance.

8. Assessment and accountability

a) *Significant advances:* In alignment with the consensus identified in CLE/CLIE 2025, the Report and Response propose revisions to the Year 6 grammar and writing assessments and to GCSE English Language (CAR p.78; DFE pp.30,25)(compare CLE/CLIE §4.6, §7.5, §5.2). Government also commits to exploring the scope for on-screen GCSE and A Level assessment (DFE p.45), which CAR sees as potentially an “opportunity to validly assess a broader set of knowledge and skills” (CAR p. 136).

b) *What is still needed:* The assessment of young people’s progress in language and literacy can be highly distorted by the use of language tests and examinations as school/college accountability measures (CLE/CLIE §7.5, §7.6, §7.7). Although there are some signs of sensitivity to this (DFE p.45; CAR p.78), “we have no plans to radically change the shape of assessments” (DFE p. 43), and for the most part, the DFE Response assumes that traditional reading and writing will form the basis for language assessment, despite recognising the need for a more engaging and inclusive curriculum. Instead, assessment methods freed from the restrictions of national accountability should be broadened to include multimodal composition, digital communication and diverse linguistic resources, and there may be opportunities for innovation in the proposals for intermediate qualifications in languages and the proposed Level 1 English qualification for 16-19 year olds (DFE p.50).

9. Cross-curricular interdisciplinarity

a) *Significant advances:* The importance of integrated curriculum development is recognised in certain areas directly related to language – oracy and media literacy – and the government commits to establishing “a fully digital and easily navigable version of the national curriculum”, “helping teachers to contextualise learning across traditional subject boundaries in the classroom” (DFE p.9; CAR p.52-53).

b) *What is still needed:* This recognition of cross-curricular issues and potentials is subordinate to a strong overall reaffirmation of subject boundaries that risks locking

² Mandarin Chinese is mentioned in one footnote [n.239 in CAR]

teachers and students into traditional subject “silos”.³ This presents a challenge for work in curriculum development that seeks to build on the widespread consensus that language is fundamental to learning right across the curriculum (see e.g. CLE/CLIE §4.3, §5.1, §6.2), and teachers are only likely to access the broader view offered by an on-line cross-curricular resource if they are motivated to do so by their initial training and continuous professional development. To stimulate and support this, organisations committed to inter-disciplinary language work have an active role to play,⁴ together with sustained dialogue and regular liaison between the more subject-specific language associations.

10. Conclusions

Looking beyond language education, there is much to welcome in the 2025 Curriculum & Assessment Report and the DFE Response, and this includes: new opportunities for enrichment activities, sports, arts and creativity; recognition that the world is fast-changing and that education needs to respond to local needs with innovation; greater freedom for teachers. In many of the areas sketched above, they also start to edge away from a retrospective curriculum model centred on print-focused monolingual Standard English, tight subject boundaries and traditional assessment modes, and there is an invitation to go much further in their headline commitment to a rich, broad, inclusive and innovative education for all. Admittedly, the complete absence of words and phrases like ‘multilingualism’, ‘bilingual’, ‘HHCL’, ‘EAL’, ‘accent’, ‘vernacular’ or indeed ‘Standard English’, is very conspicuous, and one may speculate on the tactical calculations informing these omissions. But we must emphatically refuse to follow suit. Instead, we should capitalise on the significant advances offered in these two documents, fill their gaps with the rich and practical understandings provided by research, professional and community experience, and work collaboratively for the inclusive, forward-looking curriculum towards which these two texts now provide official impetus.

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Key references

CAR (Curriculum & Assessment Review) 2025. [*Building a world-class curriculum for all: Final Report*](#).
CLE/CLIE (Coalition for Language Education/Committee for Linguistics in Education) 2025. [*Digest of Language-related Responses to the DfE Curriculum and Assessment Review 2024*](#).
DFE (Department for Education) 2025. [*Government response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review*](#). UK Government.

³ CAR’s term p.168

⁴ This includes ourselves (CLE) alongside bodies like the Committee for Linguistics in Education, the British Association for Applied Linguistics, the British Academy, and The Languages Gateway.