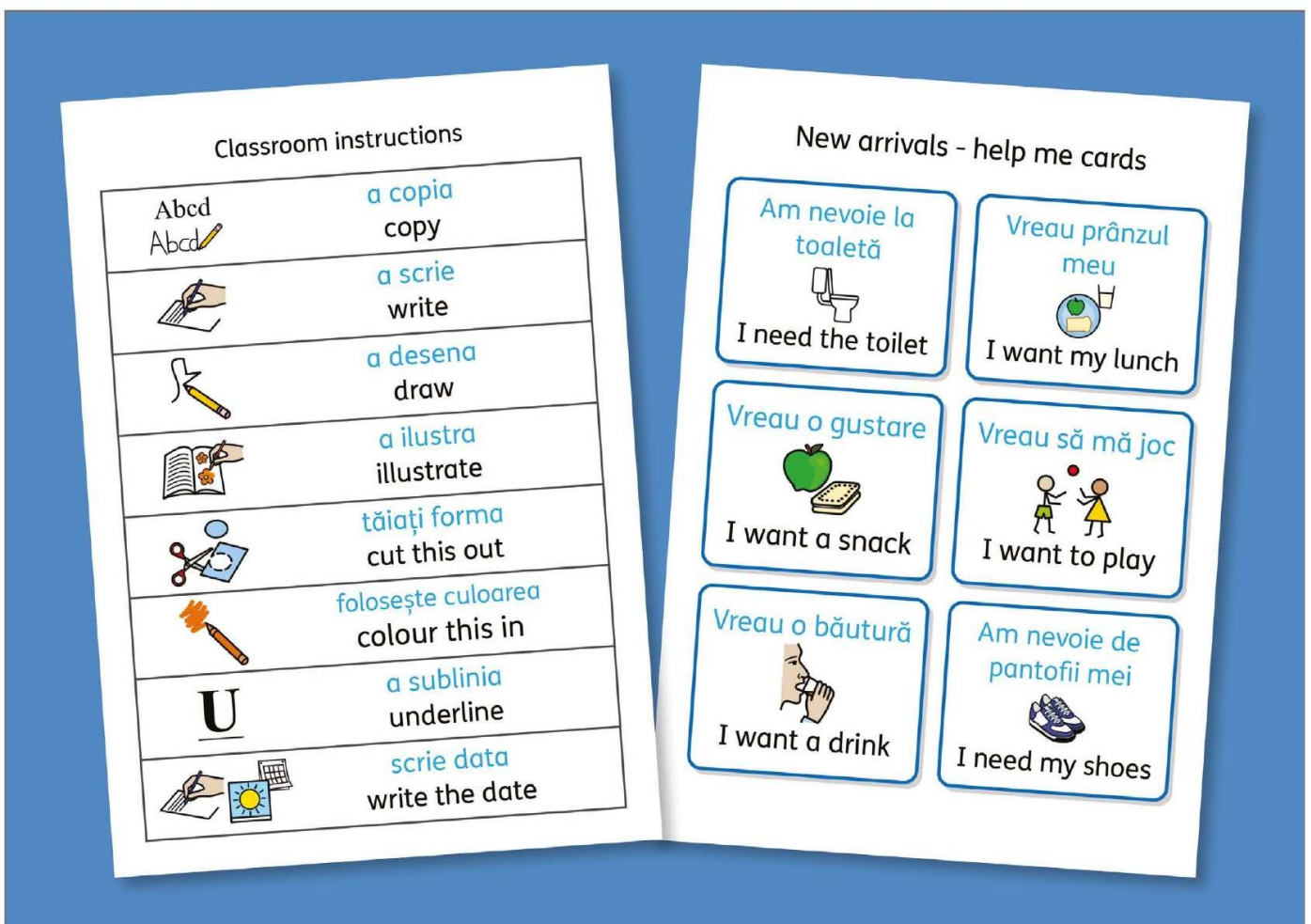


Helping child refugees develop the building blocks of English

Sue White, former teacher, local government advisor and senior educational specialist at Widgit, offers some key strategies to help children entering the UK as refugees to develop English language.



There are currently 1.6 million children supported in UK schools who do not speak English as their first language.

This number could rise as more child refugees arrive in the UK through Afghan resettlement schemes or to escape conflicts in Syria and Ukraine.

Schools need effective strategies they can implement quickly to help pupils with little or no English to develop the communication skills they need to settle quickly and make friends.

Above are three tried and tested strategies for supporting child refugees and other pupils with English as an additional language (EAL).

1. Provide a learning buddy

Children with limited English can be quickly overwhelmed by an unfamiliar classroom, but a learning buddy can reduce anxiety and help them be ready to learn.

A friendly child with good communication skills can help a new pupil feel welcome, show them

where to hang their coat and find the equipment they need for lessons.

Locating the children at the front of the class helps too. This makes it easier for a pupil who doesn't speak English to see your facial expressions, which are critical to understanding and developing the foundations of communication in an unfamiliar language.

2. Adjust your teaching style

Consider how you can simplify the language you use when you're



teaching a class which includes child refugees with little English. This will prevent them from disengaging if they don't understand what's being said.

Using a phrase such as 'warmer weather' alongside 'climate change' in a science lesson, for example, will give children a starting point from which they can develop more complex language without losing the learning.

Factor in more time for pupils who don't speak English to process instructions or respond to questions they are asked in a lesson too.

It may take longer for the child to translate from English into their home language and then back into English before they respond. Allowing them extra time will reduce stress and encourage them to take part in classroom activities.

3. Use visual aids

Once words are spoken they disappear. Instructions written in English are difficult for children with

limited English to interpret too, so they are less likely to engage in learning or group tasks.

Using visual prompts such as symbols in school can be a quick and easy way to help pupils with EAL to build the vocabulary they need to progress. Symbols reduce anxiety by giving children a permanent reminder of language that is focussed on the specific message you are trying to get across. They give a child a sense of independence and belonging too, as they can join in activities without requiring as much adult support.

You could create communication charts containing essential school vocabulary such as 'write,' 'draw' or 'I need the toilet', for example, and include a symbol to represent each phrase. Adding the words in English and the child's home language will help them communicate and better understand what you are asking them to do, as in the examples below designed for supporting children whose first language is Romanian.

Symbols can be used to help scaffold learning tasks too, providing structured activities children can complete independently, boosting self-esteem.

They can also provide visual representations of specific vocabulary, concepts, idioms or common English vernacular, which a child refugee may not be familiar with. So, if you're discussing a story about 'Sunday roasts', you can have a prepared symbol of a roast chicken dinner alongside a calendar displaying Sunday to explain the concept visually.

With a few small adjustments to lesson planning schools can better support child refugees, improve their understanding and learning of English and give them a positive start to their education in the UK.

For more information on using symbols to support children with English as an additional language, visit www.widgit.com/eal