**Working with Interpreters - Best Practice Guidelines**

**Pre-session**

* Allow enough time for the actual appointment (twice as long as a standard appointment).
* Consider seating arrangement: recommended is a triangle- or circle-shaped arrangement so that all participants can have eye contact.
* Brief the interpreter beforehand on purpose of meeting and on what is expected of the interpreter (to interpret everything that is said and to report back everything – not to make decisions about what is appropriate to interpret – not to give his/her personal opinion – not to add anything or leave out anything because he/she does not think it is important )

**During the meeting please ensure that you:**

* Introduce everyone and explain their roles.
* All parties should know that interpreter will translate everything said
* The interpreter’s role is to facilitate communication
* The interpreter is trained to remain impartial. Do not compromise the interpreter’s position by asking for his/her personal opinion on the parent or situation discussed.
* Speak directly to the parent not to the interpreter, i.e. address parent not interpreter. For example, when you address the parent, say ‘You’ rather than saying to the interpreter, ‘Please explain to Mr... that.....’
* Do not get involved in discussion with the interpreter as this can make a parent feel suspicious and isolated.
* Maintain eye contact with the parent
* Speak plainly – avoid jargon, euphemisms and abbreviations
* Explain and clarify/simplify educational terms, for instance, Phonics, Curriculum for Excellence, Guidance Teacher, Pastoral Head, challenging behaviour etc.
* Keep your sentences concise and remember to pause frequently to allow the interpreter to relay the information accurately to the parent.
* Listen actively to both parent and interpreter
* Be aware of body language
* Clarify and summarise main points at the end of meeting
* Ensure that the parents have the opportunity to ask questions

If appropriate, have a post-interview discussion/debriefing with the interpreter

**When to book an interpreter?**

The use of an interpreter, where needed, for any meeting is vitally important so that all parties can express themselves without fear of misunderstanding. If language is a barrier, using an interpreter at a meeting is crucial in order to achieve a successful and satisfying outcome where all participating parties had a voice.

It is obvious that an interpreter needs to be booked if parents/carers speak no English or only little English. If parents/carers are not yet fluent English speakers, you should offer to arrange an interpreter.  Otherwise you might get a lot of nods but puzzled eyes. Furthermore, when communicating in an additional language, comprehension is often easier than articulation. Parents/carers might be able to understand you but might be very reluctant to ask further questions or share more complex information.  If you want to make sure parents/carers have a voice and a two-way communication can take place, an interpreter might be needed.

**Don’t ask this:**

* You won’t need an interpreter, will you?
* Do you speak English?

Parents/carers may not want to state that that they might find it challenging to engage in a longer, more complex conversation.  Sometimes people overestimate their fluency levels.

* Will an interpreter be needed?

Parents/carers may think they have to arrange the interpreter themselves and/or they have to meet the cost.

**Do ask this**:

* In our school we use interpreters to make sure we can communicate effectively with parents/carers. Do you want me to arrange for an interpreter to come along to the meeting?

Before arranging an interpreter, you will need to know what language/ dialect parents/carers speak.