Who are NESB Students?
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Non-English-speaking background (NESB) students fall into a number of different ‘categories’. According to the publication *Effective Provisions for Students from Language Backgrounds other than English – A Guideline for Primary Schools* (van Hees et al, 1994, p. 30), NESB students can variously be regarded as:

- ‘Children beginning school at 5–6 years old with minimal or no exposure to English.’
- Students beginning school after normal commencement age with no previous formal schooling in any country.
- Students who have had most or all of their education in New Zealand but who have difficulty with the English language in mainstream classes.
- Students from other countries with an equivalent amount of schooling as their peers in New Zealand but who have learned in a language other than English.
- Students beginning school after normal commencement age, with severely disrupted schooling.
- Students who have specific learning difficulties, possibly due to reasons other than language and cultural differences.’

These categories are indicative of the considerable diversity of needs among NESB students and have important implications for the types of programmes that are provided for students whose schools are entitled to ESOL funding on their behalf. A major contrast in New Zealand schools is, for example, the group of New Zealand-born Pacific Islands students in some areas who require learning assistance through NESB programmes and, in much more recent times, the increasingly large group of NESB students who are the children of business migrants from Asian countries. Still another group of NESB students (also including some very recent arrivals — for example, those from Somalia) are those who enter the country with ‘refugee status’. All three ‘groups’ of students are likely to have very different needs, not only in terms of learning English but also socially and culturally. Furthermore, representatives of all three ‘groups’ (plus other NESB students, such as recent immigrants from the Pacific Islands) may all attend the same school, thus creating a considerable challenge for staff and other students. Also, as is discussed in the chapter following, an understanding of NESB students’ background, family, and individual characteristics has an important part to play in decisions about the sorts of programmes that should be provided. A comment from one participant in the study illustrates this point:
I define an NESB student as far wider than their oral speaking ability. NESB children to me mean those whose background is different from the dominant English culture of New Zealand. (And that goes for Maori children as well.) So we’re expecting them to learn, using quite a different vocabulary, about things that are totally different from their background, that they wouldn’t experience within their normal, everyday life. I think as teachers we need to be aware that what we do at home and our expectations may be different [from what our students do and expect]. That’s not to say that the [ways and expectations of] others are wrong or right, but as teachers we must have that knowledge [of different ways] in order to be able to teach these children effectively. I think that is where the [role and attitudes of the] teacher [are] really important — that we look on this [teaching of NESB children] as a positive thing and we celebrate those differences.” [Deputy principal, primary school.]