Key messages about middle leaders supporting multi-lingual English language learners in secondary schools

What is important to know about leading support for multi-lingual English language learners (ELLs)?
There are complex requirements to meet the needs of the ELLs in any school context, making the middle leader role unique to each school. There is a continual demand in New Zealand schools to adapt support as numbers and/or diversity of ELLs continues to change. The ELL school population includes those from migrant and refugee backgrounds (ranging from NZ-born to new arrivals), international students, exchange students and those transitioning from kura kaupapa. Many ELLs are included in ‘priority learner’ groups that are a focus for the Ministry of Education. Leaders in this field have important roles in ensuring ELLs develop and maintain identities of competence. The middle leadership role in support of English language learners often involves leading a department and managing specific responsibilities in addition to teaching timetabled classes.

Responsibilities may include:

- developing programmes of learning catering for a wide range of students (different educational experiences, stages of English, ages, cultures, languages and identities, length of time in NZ, educational and vocational pathways)
- management of a range of NCEA assessment, e.g. Levels 1-3 English Language unit standards, Level 1 Literacy unit standards, English for Academic Purposes unit standards and assessment from other Learning Areas such as English and Languages achievement standards for bilingual or multilingual students (e.g. Samoan, Tongan, Chinese)
- responsibilities to ensure mainstream teachers help ELLs develop competencies in language learning in all Learning Areas as conceptualised in the NZ Curriculum (p.16)
- support for the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to manage systems to identify ELLs’ strengths and needs, place them and monitor their learning (using the English Language Learning Progressions) and share this information with key stakeholders to inform teaching and learning.
- managing the Ministry of Education’s funding mechanisms in accordance with prescribed criteria and managing allotted budgets efficiently and effectively to ensure the needs of the identified ELLs are met
- meeting the needs of fee paying international students in accordance with the Code of Practice
- maintaining connections with communities and families and developing opportunities for diverse languages and cultures to be recognised and fostered
- liaising with deans, careers advisors and other support staff to ensure ELLs’ and their families’ aspirations about educational and vocational are pathways recognised.

Middle leadership job descriptions
The bullet points above could be used in a job description for middle leadership positions. These roles and responsibilities are often clarified in formal written job/position descriptions. Job descriptions give attention to leadership in achieving the best learning outcomes for ELLs (including priority learners). They help ensure that ELLs’ languages, cultures and identities are recognised and supported. They help ensure that attention is given to appropriate decision-making about teaching English language in context. A key purpose is to distinguish roles e.g. English HOD, International Director. Another purpose is to clarify lines of communication with key stakeholders e.g. SLT, BOT, teachers in department, teacher aides, bilingual language assistants, administrators, whanau and community representatives. A job/position description should be adaptive and responsive to changing and diverse responsibilities and be reviewed regularly.

Where can I see a model of a job/position description for specialist teachers of ELLs?
For specialist teachers of ELLs, a model that is linked with the Registered Teacher Criteria can be seen at: http://www.edplus.canterbury.ac.nz/esolsecond/resources.shtml