



Estyn

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Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

Best practice in the reading and writing of pupils aged five to seven years



BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



MARCH 2009

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Introduction

- 1 The purpose of this report is to provide advice in response to Estyn's annual Ministerial remit from the Welsh Assembly Government. The report provides an overview of standards and the quality of provision in English and Welsh as core National Curriculum subjects for five to seven year olds. It evaluates the learning and teaching of reading and writing and identifies best practice in key areas, including curriculum planning, assessment, meeting pupils' needs, partnership with parents and leadership and management. Appendix 1 provides case studies of best practice.
- 2 Being able to read and write accurately, fluently and with confidence and understanding is crucial to achieving high standards in English and Welsh, as well as giving pupils more opportunities for success at school. This report aims to inform current practice and be relevant to work within the context of the Foundation Phase.
- 3 The challenge is to spread best practice more widely and consistently so that the learning and teaching of reading and writing skills in all schools across Wales are as good as they can possibly be. Appendix 2 includes a toolkit for self-evaluation that may help schools review and improve important areas of their work.
- 4 The report is intended mainly for teachers and learning support assistants who are involved in teaching reading and writing in primary schools, senior managers and local authority (LA) advisers. The report may also be of interest to institutions that train teachers, church diocesan authorities, national bodies in Wales and others with an interest in education.
- 5 This report is the third in a series of reports focusing on reading and writing, which together provide guidance on key areas of learning and teaching of literacy¹ for pupils aged three to 14 years. The reports are:
 - Improving the learning and teaching and early reading skills (2007); and
 - Best practice in the reading and writing of pupils aged 7 to 14 years (2008).
- 6 These reports can be accessed on www.estyn.gov.uk.
- 7 There are many considerations in the learning and teaching of reading and writing skills. This report does not aim to provide a definitive account of all of these considerations. In particular, reference to areas such as phonics is included in Estyn's report on 'Improving the learning and teaching of early reading skills'.
- 8 Throughout the report, references to primary schools include infant schools.

¹ References to literacy include reading and writing.

Background

- 9 The four strands of language: listening, speaking², reading and writing, are interrelated and develop together. Research shows that early progress in reading and writing is dependent upon the learner's oral language development. Developing good oracy skills is therefore vital to success in learning to read and write for pupils aged five to seven years of age. Around one in seven pupils in Wales do not achieve the level expected of seven year olds in oracy. Difficulty in oracy limits pupils' progress in learning to read and write and in all other areas of learning.
- 10 Research recognises that learning to read and write presents greater challenges than learning to speak. Although speaking, reading and writing all use language, they are not mirror images of each other. There are many differences between spoken and written language. For example, speech is often spontaneous and informal, it usually occurs in a context with another person present, and the listener's understanding is aided by the speaker's gestures and intonation. Reading involves a number of processes and skills, including word recognition and comprehension. Readers also make use of their knowledge of vocabulary and grammar and their wider experience with texts in order to help them understand the written word. The distinctive features of writing are that it is usually planned, organised and permanent. Effective writing depends on learning the conventions of spelling, punctuation and grammar and the skills of handwriting.
- 11 For many pupils, perceiving how written symbols correspond to the spoken language, making sense of words and sentences and learning and using the conventions of writing become major challenges, affecting the progress they make in gaining reading and writing skills. "Spoken thoughts come freely in the school playground, but written ones are laboured in the classroom"³ expresses these challenges well. Notwithstanding the dependency of reading and writing on oracy, it is important to recognise that the processes and skills involved in reading and writing have few direct counterparts in speech. Reading and writing are skills that need to be taught explicitly to pupils.
- 12 Over the past decade, many schools have been successful in improving the standard of pupils' English and Welsh. However, for the past five years, gains have been more difficult to achieve: the pace of improvement has slowed and, in most respects, progress has plateaued. There are differences in the achievements of boys and girls that are evident by the time pupils are seven years of age. At the end of key stage 1, boys are around nine percentage points behind girls in achieving at least level 2 (the level expected of the great majority of seven year olds). This is almost three times more than the difference between boys' and girls' performance in mathematics and science. This 'gender gap' is an international phenomenon occurring in Wales, in other parts of the UK and beyond. The slow rate at which boys develop reading and writing skills is recognised as one of the contributory factors that lead to an even wider gap between the performance of boys and girls at later stages of learning.

² Speaking and listening are referred to as oracy in this rest of this report.

³ Growing Up Writing (1991) A. Silberman

- 13 When pupils practise their reading and writing skills in a range of different subject contexts, they can develop their skills to higher levels. Good reading and writing skills also support all aspects of learning across the curriculum. Ensuring pupils develop these skills in a progressive and systematic way in subjects across the curriculum enables them to build on and improve the skills they gain in English and Welsh lessons. It is self-evident that when pupils have difficulty with reading and writing, this affects their progress in all other subjects.
- 14 Reading and writing are not only tools for communication but also skills important to the processes of developing thinking. For example, when pupils explain what they like about the story they are reading and when they write about an experiment that worked, they are forming their own opinions and ability to reflect on their learning. In this way, the skills of reading and writing are vital to pupils' cognitive development, helping them to develop their ideas, acquire understanding and explore and make sense of their world.
- 15 Currently, in Wales, there are changes to the school curriculum. New approaches to the education of children are being introduced through a Foundation Phase for three to seven year olds⁴. In this phase, the emphasis is on learning through experiences that focus on the individual and his/her stage of development, and includes greater promotion of play and active-learning approaches as well as a strong emphasis on using the outdoor environment as a resource for learning. These approaches offer many advantages in the drive to improve standards of reading and writing as well as a unique opportunity for the next generation of Welsh pupils to become fully bilingual, whether they attend Welsh-medium schools, bilingual schools or English-medium schools. There are also other changes and curriculum developments including more emphasis on a skills-focused curriculum⁵, assessment for learning and the principles of effective pedagogy, as well as developing metacognition (thinking about thinking) to help pupils reflect on their learning and achieve more.
- 16 In the context of curriculum changes, pedagogical emphases and the challenge to improve pupils' achievements, including boys' performance, this report considers best practice in the learning and teaching of reading and writing skills and provides guidance to help raise standards.

⁴ Framework for Children's Learning for 3 to 7 year olds in Wales (2008), Welsh Assembly Government

⁵ Skills Framework for 3 to 19 year olds in Wales, (2008) Welsh Assembly Government

The evidence base of the report

- 17 The findings and recommendations in this report draw on:
- an analysis of the inspection outcomes of primary schools⁶ inspected during 2005-2008;
 - an analysis of National Curriculum teacher assessment results in English and Welsh for five to seven year olds;
 - observations of the teaching of literacy and information gained from interviews with staff in 13 primary schools where either English or Welsh is used as the main medium for learning;
 - information gained from an analysis of the inspection outcomes of local authorities (LAs) and interviews with literacy advisers;
 - scrutiny of documentation provided by schools and LAs; and
 - recent research and literature about the teaching of reading and writing.

⁶ Infant schools and infant departments in primary schools

Main findings

Standards of reading and writing

- 18 Across Wales, many pupils gain good reading and writing skills in English and Welsh as a first language that enable them to progress well in their learning. However, the percentage of seven year old pupils achieving at least level 2 in English and Welsh has remained at a similar level since 2000. In 2008, around one in five pupils did not achieve the level expected of the great majority of seven year olds in reading and writing. Twice as many pupils achieved the higher level 3 in teacher assessment results in reading than in writing. The percentage of pupils gaining the higher level 3 in teacher assessment results in both reading and writing has remained around the same level for the past five years.
- 19 The gap between boys' and girls' performance is wider in English and Welsh than in the other core subjects. This gap has remained at around nine percentage points for the past eight years, with the widest difference being in standards of writing.
- 20 Between 2005 and 2008, standards in English and Welsh first language were inspected in around four hundred primary⁷ schools in Wales. Inspection identified good or better standards of pupils' work in reading and writing in 82% of the English-medium primary schools and in 77% in Welsh-medium primary schools. Overall, the most common areas for improvement in the standards of pupils' reading and writing in both English and Welsh are:
- lack of use of a wide range of decoding strategies;
 - limited fluency and expression in reading;
 - under-developed information retrieval skills;
 - lack of extended writing skills; and
 - weaknesses in spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting.
- 21 Charts 1 and 2 below show that in a few English-medium and Welsh-medium schools where there were shortcomings in reading and writing, there were also shortcomings in pupils' oracy skills. In Welsh-medium schools, an increasing proportion of pupils have English-speaking backgrounds and, at this stage, these pupils' oracy skills may be less well developed.

⁷ English and/or Welsh were two of the subjects inspected in either a standard or full inspection. Other schools received a short inspection where there is no inspection of subjects.

Chart 1: Standards in English in English-medium schools in key stage 1 identified by inspection

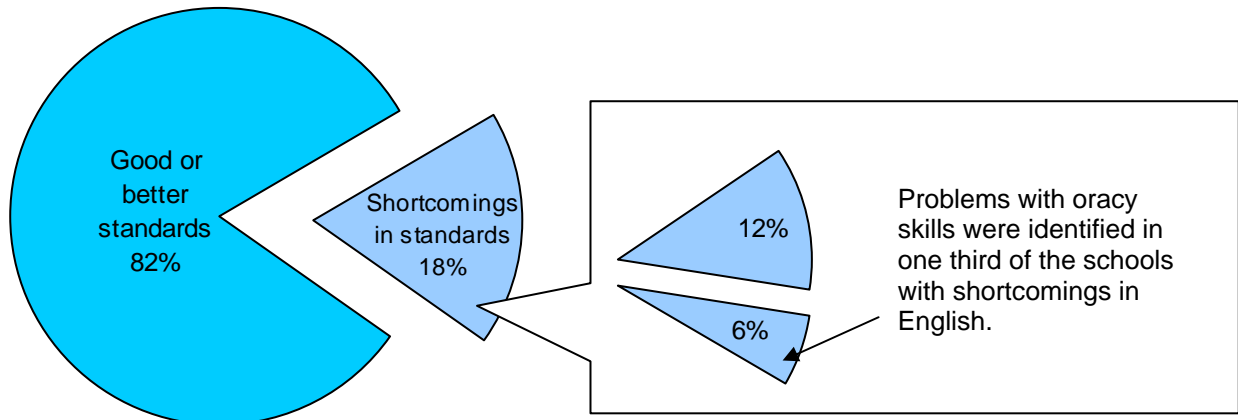
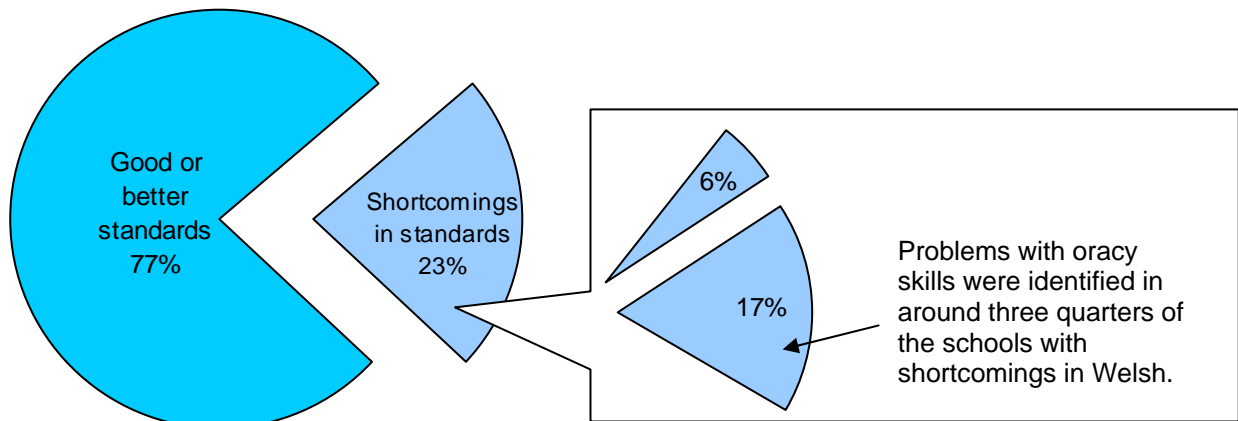


Chart 2: Standards in Welsh in Welsh-medium schools in key stage 1 identified by inspection



- 22 When pupils have limited oral skills, this has a direct effect on their early progress in developing reading and writing skills. Improving pupils' oracy skills must therefore be a vital component of schools' work to raise standards of reading and writing.

Teaching and assessment

- 23 The overall quality of teaching in English and Welsh of most five to seven year olds is good. There is often skilful direct teaching of reading and writing through approaches such as guided reading and shared writing. In the best practice, teachers link oral, reading and writing work and provide a careful blend of structured and active-learning activities.
- 24 In a few schools, the range of writing tasks set is formulaic or does not require enough extended writing effort from pupils. Where worksheets are over-used or undemanding, pupils have fewer opportunities to write independently and at length.
- 25 The assessment of reading and writing has improved year-on-year. Most schools use a range of performance data well to track pupils' progress. The use of assessment to plan improvements in writing is not as effective as the use of assessment information to improve reading.

- 26 In the most effective schools, techniques, such as assessment for learning, help pupils to know where they are, what they need to do to improve and how to bring about improvements. The use of target-setting is increasingly involving pupils. More schools are providing pupils with opportunities to assess their own and others' work, but this practice is not widespread enough.

Curriculum planning

- 27 Most schools produce coherent and comprehensive curriculum plans that draw on local authority, commercial and other guidance. Work is usually organised around suitable topics or themes. In a very few schools, there is not enough planning for pupils to gain a wide range of decoding strategies and information retrieval skills. In the majority of schools, pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their writing skills for authentic audiences other than the teacher.
- 28 Many schools recognise the holistic nature of language learning and plan well for all aspects and in the context of changes linked to the Foundation Phase. In the most effective schools, this is evident in carefully balanced planning for structured literacy work along with play-based language activities to secure oral, reading and writing skills.
- 29 In a few schools, highly structured planning and a strict adherence to a particular scheme can limit the scope of pupils' learning, particularly in developing creativity and meeting the needs of more able and talented pupils. In a few Welsh-medium schools, curriculum planning does not take enough account of the particular learning needs of pupils who do not speak Welsh as a first language fluently.

Meeting the needs of pupils

- 30 Most schools provide good support in reading and writing for pupils with special educational needs and those who have English as an additional language. Increasingly, support programmes focus on improving pupils' oracy skills.
- 31 Commonly, these pupils usually receive support to improve their spelling and handwriting skills, but there is often not enough emphasis on the composition of writing, such as the selection, ordering and development of ideas and information.
- 32 More schools are improving provision for more-able and talented pupils. However, only a small minority of schools provide these pupils with reading and writing tasks that stretch and challenge them. Effective schools use a range of strategies, including a strong emphasis on problem-solving approaches and setting writing tasks in a wide range of styles and genre. In these schools, staff are also aware that an over-emphasis on narrative forms of writing can be less appealing to boys. In a very few schools, mis-conceptions or narrow interpretations of what defines more-able and talented pupils hinder the identification of, and support for, these pupils.

Partnership with parents

- 33 Schools usually have good links with parents and many provide a good range of information for parents, particularly about how their child learns to read and spell. Usually, there is less information for parents about how the school promotes writing skills and how parents can support their child.

Leadership and management

- 34 Focused leadership and management in primary schools have led to improvements in pupils' literacy skills over the past 10 years. The leadership of many teachers with responsibility for English and Welsh has contributed significantly to the improvements in the quality of planning, continuity and progression and teaching and assessment.
- 35 Over the past 10 years, reading has commonly been the greatest priority for development in school improvement planning. Even when standards in writing require improvement, a few schools do not make it a priority.
- 36 Most local authorities provide some good support for schools to improve standards in English and Welsh for five to seven year olds. The outstanding practice in a few authorities has contributed significantly to standards of pupils' reading and writing skills at this stage. Over the past 10 years, the very good literacy strategy and outstanding support for literacy in schools in Newport by the local authority have helped to raise and sustain high standards in key stage 1. More recently, high-quality advisory work and initiatives to improve levels of literacy, especially writing, are helping schools in Caerphilly local authority to raise standards in key stage 1 at a much higher improvement rate than the all-Wales average improvement.
- 37 Not all authorities analyse specific data on reading and writing in sufficient detail to help them support and challenge school performance.

Recommendations

Schools should:

- R1 continue to raise standards in English and Welsh by giving attention to the development of pupils':
- oracy skills to support their progress in learning to read and write;
 - use of a wide range of reading strategies;
 - information retrieval strategies;
 - skills in writing at length; and
 - spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting;
- R2 continue to improve curriculum planning:
- by reconciling existing planning with the philosophy of the Foundation Phase to provide a careful blend of structured and play-based reading and writing activities;
 - by avoiding a very strict adherence to published schemes when this limits the scope of pupils' learning;
 - for the particular learning needs of pupils who do not speak Welsh as a first language in schools where traditionally a majority have been first language speakers; and
 - to enable communication skills (oracy, reading and writing) to be developed progressively in subjects across the curriculum;
- R3 continue to improve teaching and assessment by:
- ensuring oracy, reading and writing are linked effectively together;
 - setting a wide range of writing tasks that enable pupils to develop their writing at length;
 - using teaching styles that develop pupils' thinking, including questioning, planning and problem-solving skills;
 - making certain that the assessment of pupils' writing is used fully to plan improvements; and
 - providing opportunities for pupils to develop their capacity for self and peer assessment;

- R4 meet the needs of pupils more fully by:
- supporting pupils to improve all aspects of their writing;
 - giving more able and talented pupils reading and writing tasks that stretch and challenge them; and
 - focusing on which boys are underachieving;
- R5 continue to develop partnerships with parents by:
- providing more information about how they can help to develop their child's writing skills; and
- R6 give reading and writing a priority by:
- targeting the weaker aspects of literacy skills evident in the school;
 - joining professional learning networks to share good practice; and
 - reviewing provision and standards of literacy regularly in line with the best practice identified in this report.

Appendix 2 provides a more detailed toolkit for self-evaluation and improvement in schools.

Local authorities should:

- R7 agree a whole-authority strategy that identifies, explicitly, action to improve standards of oracy, reading and writing for five to seven year olds, and includes a focus on the issues raised in the recommendations already noted above; and
- R8 learn from the outstanding practice of a few authorities in securing and sustaining improvements in reading and writing.

Providers of initial teacher education should:

- R9 note the contents of this report to inform the training of new teachers.

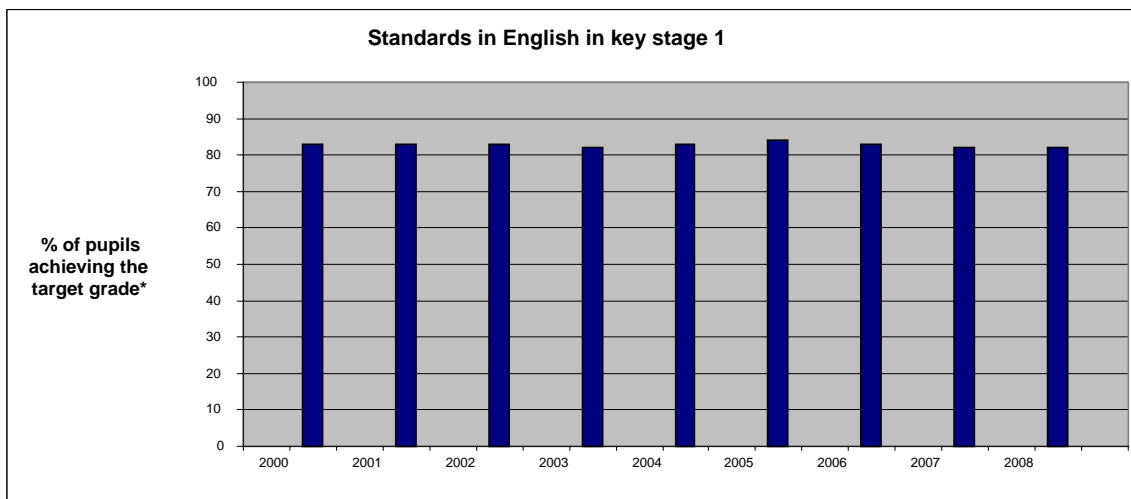
The Welsh Assembly Government should:

- R10 continue to make funding available for local authorities to work with schools to improve reading and writing skills, with a particular focus on writing.

Standards in English and Welsh as a first language in key stage 1

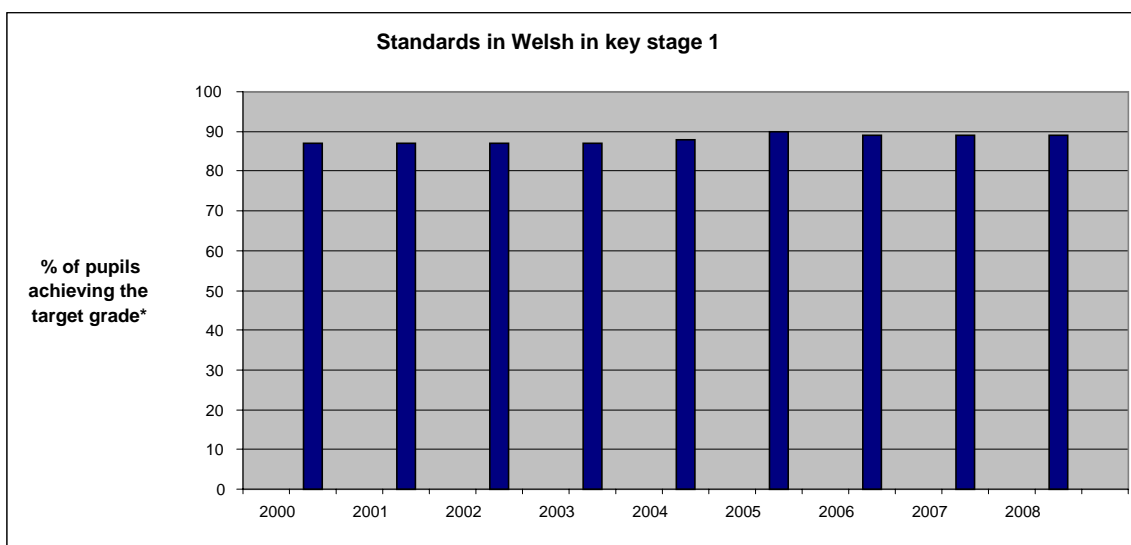
- 38 The percentage of seven year olds achieving at least level 2 has remained at a similar level in English and Welsh as a first language since 2000. Standards reached their highest level in 2005. In both English and Welsh, around one in five pupils do not achieve the level expected of the great majority of seven year olds in reading or writing. The percentage of pupils gaining the higher level 3 in teacher assessment results in reading and writing has also remained around the same level for the past five years. Lack of literacy skills affects pupils' overall progress and limits the way they can achieve in school and later life.
- 39 Charts 3 and 4 below show the standards pupils achieved in English and Welsh from 2000 to 2008⁸.

Chart 3: National Curriculum teacher assessments of seven year olds in English



* The expected level for key stage 1 is level 2.

Chart 4: National Curriculum teacher assessments of seven year olds in Welsh



* The expected level for key stage 1 is level 2.

⁸ Statistical Directorate, National Assembly for Wales

40 At five years of age, most pupils will have achieved higher standards in oracy in English and Welsh than in reading or writing. This is because learning to read and write is dependent upon pupils' spoken language skills. Usually, pupils develop reading skills sooner and faster than their writing skills. In 2008, around twice as many pupils achieved the higher level 3 in reading than in writing in English and Welsh. The difference between standards of reading and writing at level 3 has remained much the same for the past five years. Charts 5 and 6 below show the percentage of pupils gaining level 2 or above in English and Welsh in oracy, reading and writing.

Chart 5: The percentage of pupils gaining level 2 or above in English in oracy, reading and writing

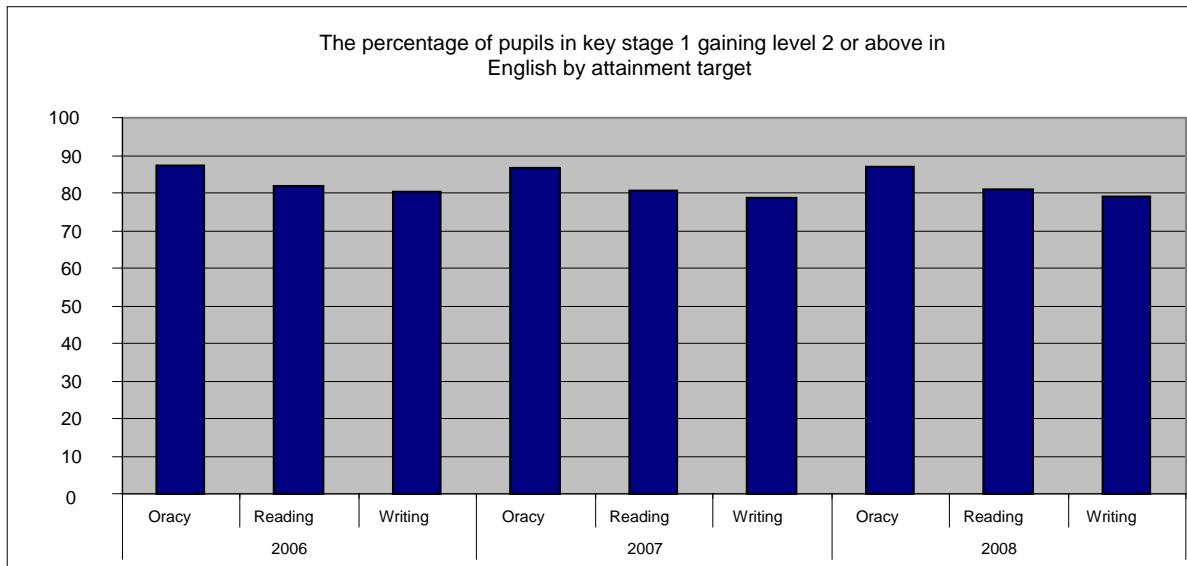
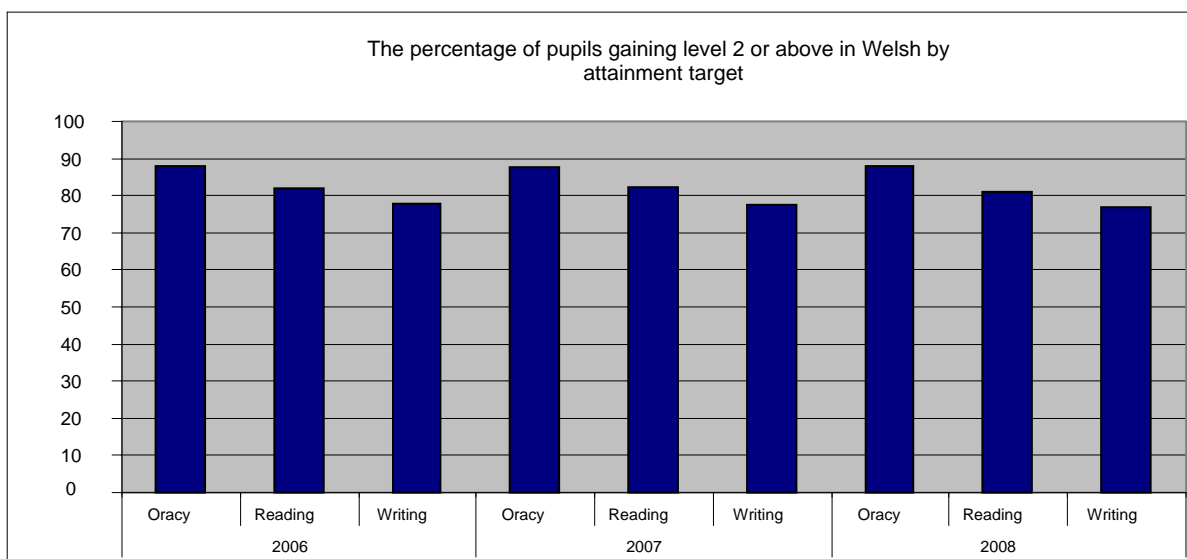


Chart 6: The percentage of pupils gaining level 2 or above in Welsh in oracy, writing and reading



The performance of boys and girls

- 41 National Curriculum teacher assessment results consistently show differences in the achievements of boys and girls in English and Welsh at seven years of age. Information about boys' and girls' performance in charts 7 and 8 below shows that the performance of boys is around nine percentage points behind girls. This difference has remained unchanged for the past five years. The difference between boys' and girls' performance continues at other key stages.

Chart 7: National Curriculum teacher assessments of boys and girls in English in key stage 1

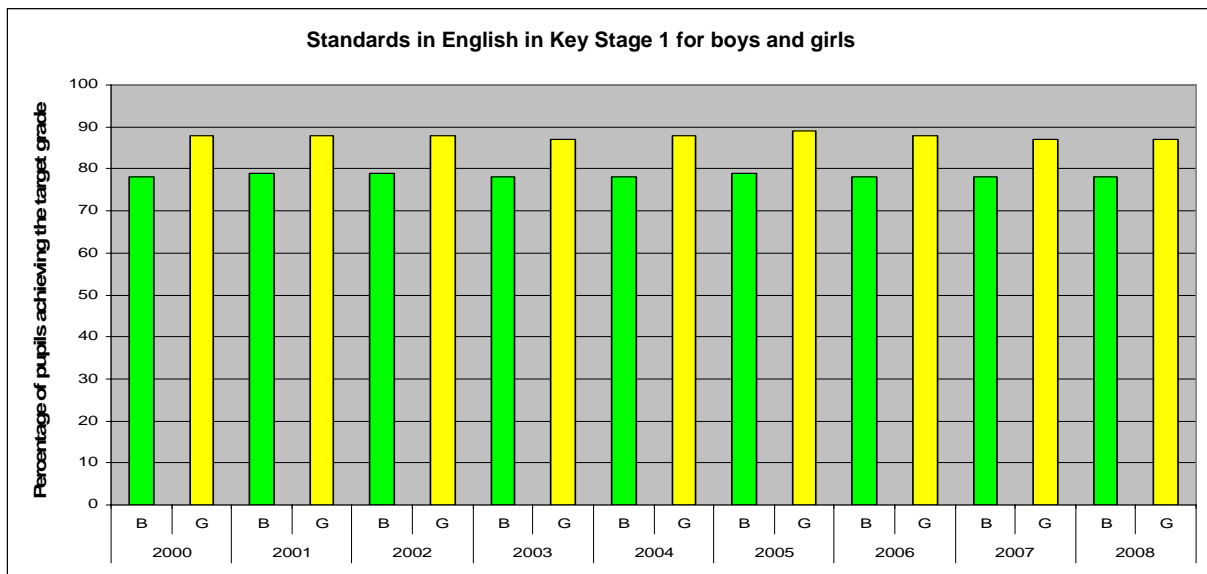
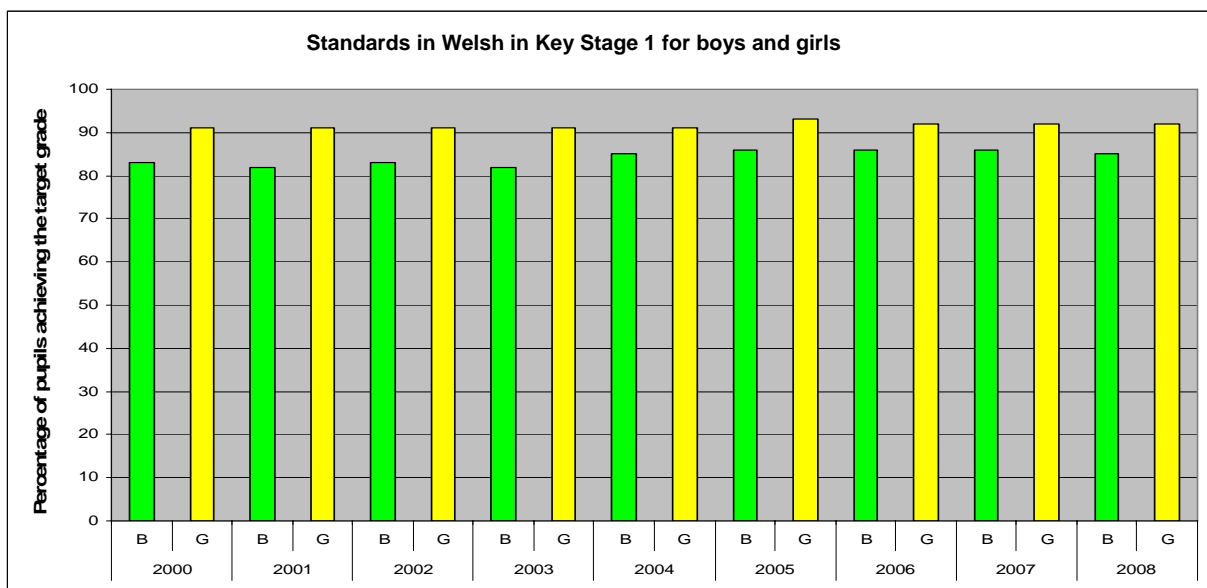


Chart 8: National Curriculum teacher assessments of boys and girls in Welsh in key stage 1



- 42 Over recent years, work to close the gap has improved boys' performance overall but the difference between the standards girls and boys achieve has remained the same. This is because girls have also benefited from the measures schools have taken to improve boys' performance. Estyn's report 'Closing the gap between boys' and girls' attainment in schools' (2008) refers in more detail to the issues involved.

Areas for improvement

- 43 The inspection of English and Welsh occurs in a proportion⁹ of schools inspected each year. An analysis of the inspection outcomes of schools for 2005 to 2008 shows shortcomings in the standards of pupils' work in reading and writing in around a fifth of the English-medium primary schools and about a quarter of the Welsh-medium primary schools. In these schools, the most common shortcomings in reading in both English and Welsh were a limited range of decoding strategies and a lack of fluency and expression when reading. There were also shortcomings in pupils' information retrieval skills in a few English-medium schools and in a very few Welsh-medium schools.
- 44 Charts 9 and 10 below show the shortcomings in the schools where inspectors judged the standards of English and Welsh to be grade 3¹⁰ or grade 4¹¹.

Chart 9: Shortcomings in standards of pupils' reading in English



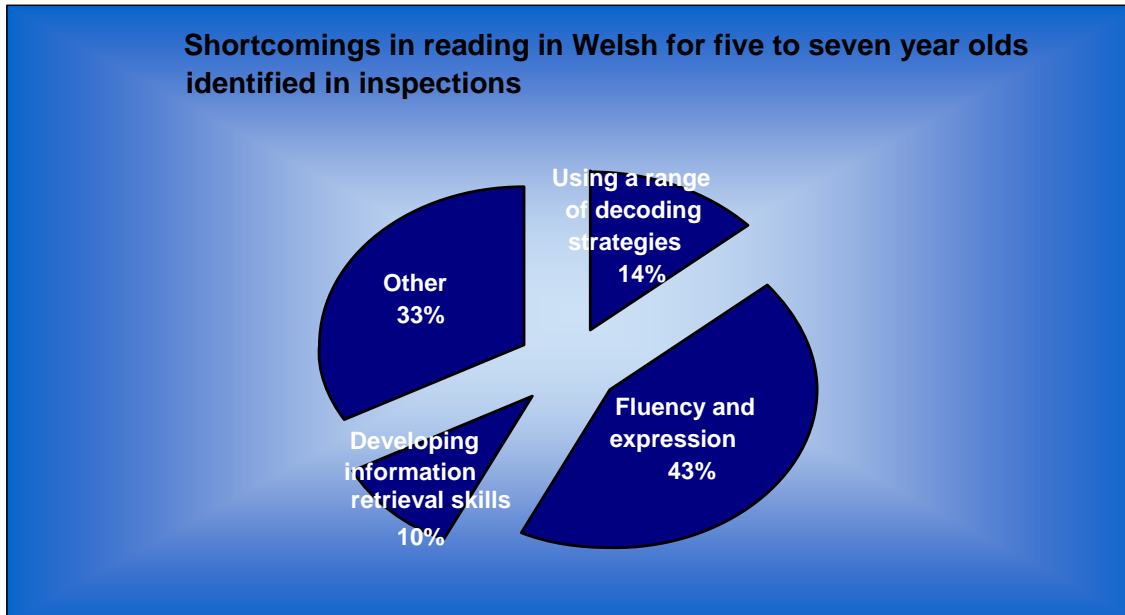
⁹ These schools receive a standard or full inspection. In short inspections, there is no inspection of subjects.

¹⁰ The definition of grade 3 is that good features outweigh shortcomings.

¹¹ The definition of grade 4 is that there are a few good features but shortcomings in important areas.

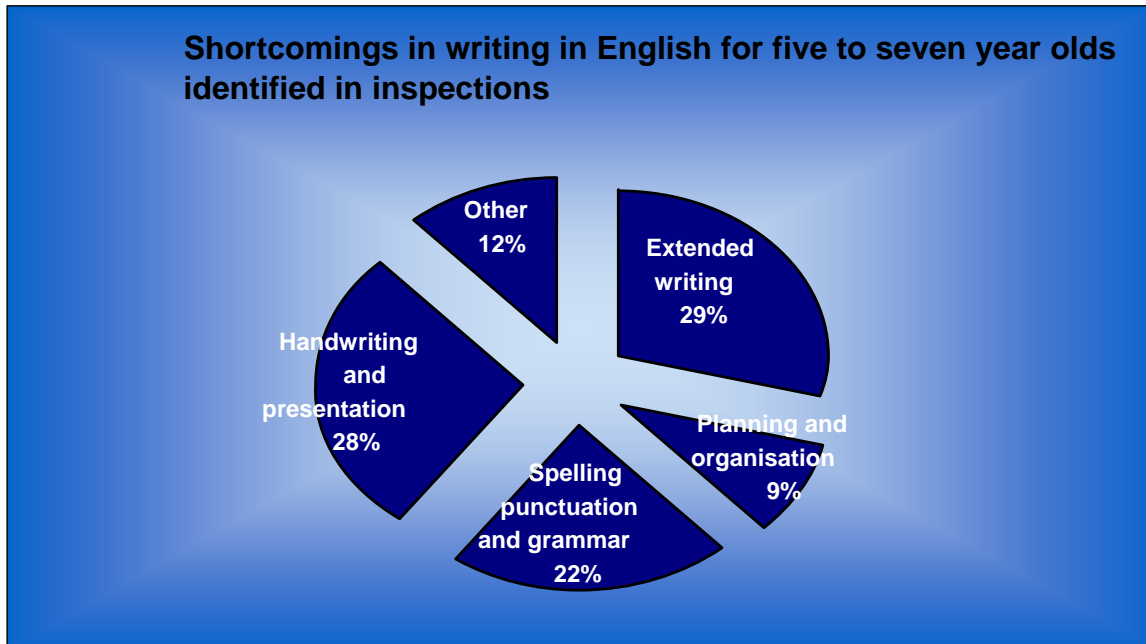
- 45 The 'Other' shortcomings in pupils' reading in English identified by inspection include:
- limited understanding of story structure;
 - lack of confidence in reading aloud; and
 - limited comprehension skills.

Chart 10: Shortcomings in standards of pupils' reading in Welsh



- 46 The 'Other' shortcomings in pupils' reading in Welsh identified by inspection include:
- lack of understanding of story structure;
 - limited comprehension skills; and
 - lack of enthusiasm for reading and confidence in reading aloud.
- 47 Charts 11 and 12 show that the most common shortcomings in pupils' writing in English and Welsh were lack of extended writing skills and inaccuracies in spelling and the use of punctuation and grammar. In English-medium schools, there were also particular shortcomings in pupils' handwriting and in the planning and organisation of their writing.

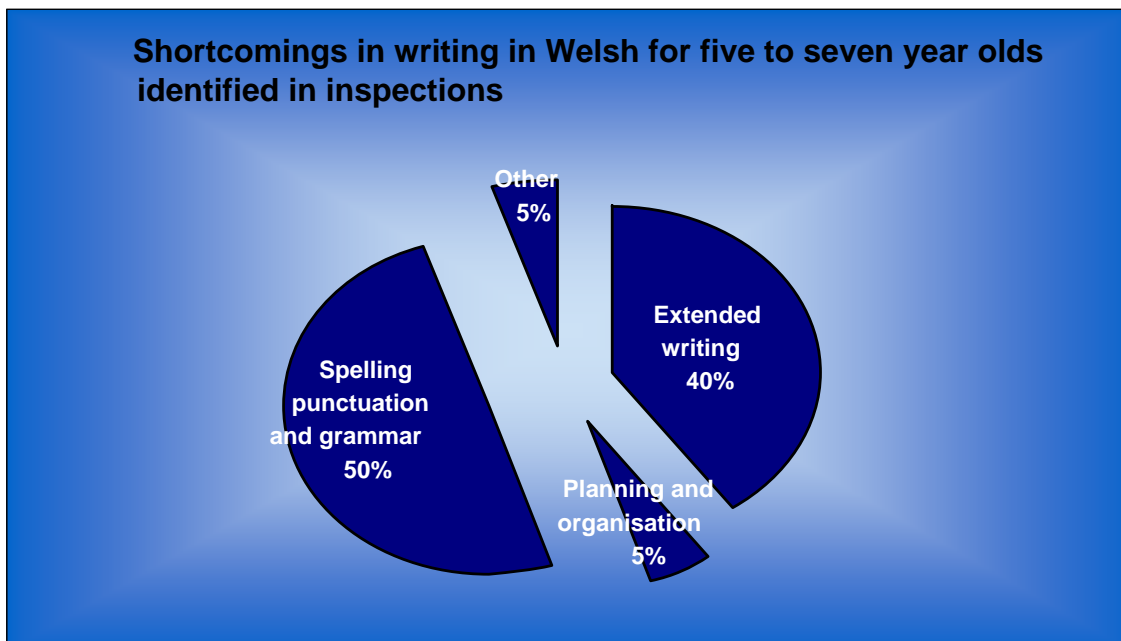
Chart 11: Shortcomings in standards of pupils' writing in English



48 The 'Other' shortcomings in pupils' writing in English identified by inspection include:

- a narrow range of writing for different purposes and forms of writing;
- lack of use of information and communications technology; and
- limited independent writing skills.

Chart 12: Shortcomings in standards of pupils' writing in Welsh



- 49 The 'Other' shortcomings in pupils' writing in Welsh identified by inspection include:
- lack of planning skills;
 - weaknesses in the organisation of written work; and
 - limited independence.

50 Where inspectors judged that there were shortcomings in pupils' reading and writing skills, they often also identified shortcomings in pupils' oracy skills. These findings are shown in charts 13 and 14 below.

Chart 13: Shortcomings in standards of pupils' writing in English

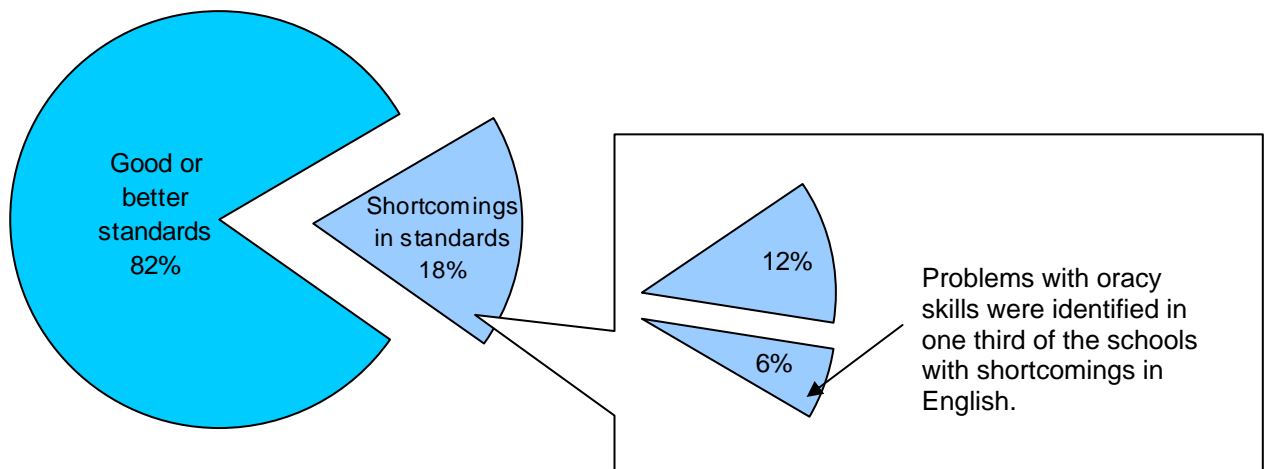
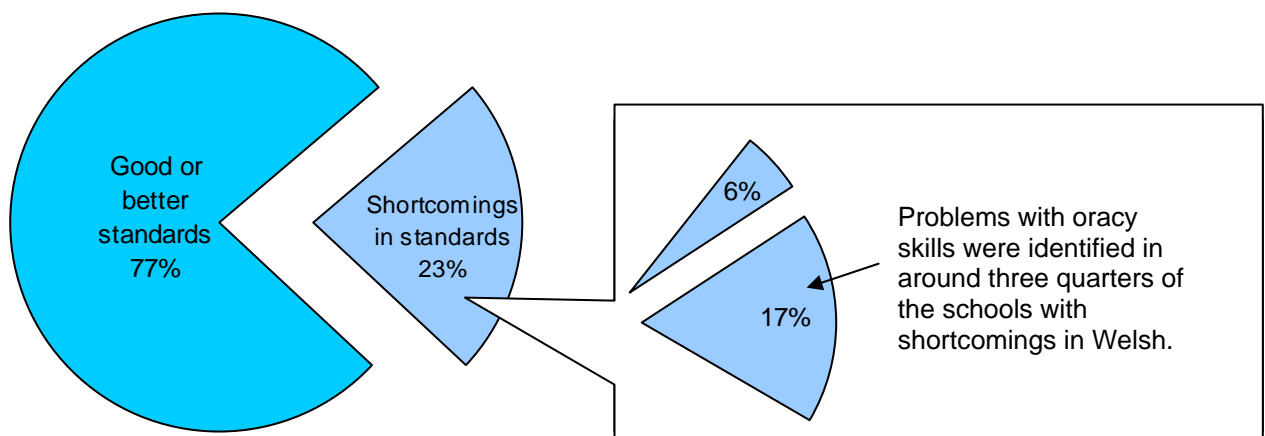


Chart 14: Shortcomings in standards of pupils' writing in Welsh



51 Chart 14 shows that more pupils in Welsh-medium schools have shortcomings in standards of Welsh. However, an increasing proportion of these pupils have English-speaking backgrounds and these pupils' oracy skills may be less well developed at this stage. This report has already referred to the dependency of reading and writing on pupils' oral language skills, which affects pupils' overall progress. Although there is usually a firm focus on oral language development in Welsh-medium schools in areas where little Welsh is spoken, this finding indicates

that these schools need to do more to help pupils develop their oracy skills. Notwithstanding the particular significance of this finding for Welsh-medium schools, improving pupils' oracy skills must be a vital component of all schools' work to raise standards of English and Welsh.

Curriculum planning

- 52 Over the past 10 years, the quality of curriculum planning for teaching English and Welsh for five to seven year olds has improved in almost all primary schools. Usually, schools draw well on a range of information, including local authority guidance, government initiatives and commercial resources to produce coherent, comprehensive plans to make certain that pupils have opportunities to gain the knowledge, understanding and skills identified in the National Curriculum.
- 53 Most schools base work on topics or themes that help to make work interesting and relevant for pupils. Effective schools see language learning as holistic: oracy, reading and writing support and enhance overall language development. Where schools do this best, they develop language in relation to the context in which it is used and engage pupils actively.
- 54 Increasingly, schools with the help of local authorities are working to bring together current practices and approaches to the learning and teaching of English and Welsh with the principles of the Foundation Phase that will apply to six and seven year olds from 2010 and 2011 respectively. In a growing number of schools, this is evident in carefully balanced planning for play-based language activities to take place alongside more formal, structured work in reading and writing. For example, these schools plan literacy activities that capitalise more on role-play, drama and outdoor learning so that pupils gain practical first-hand experiences. Where this is most successful, pupils build an extensive vocabulary and oral experience, which helps to scaffold and support their reading and writing in literacy lessons as well as in subjects across the curriculum. This approach also enables schools to give greater emphasis to active-learning approaches to provide stimulating reading and writing opportunities. Most schools also recognise the motivating effect of information and communications technology (ICT) on pupils' learning. They plan well for pupils to have access to listening centres, electronic books, computers and digital cameras, which help to develop pupils' literacy skills.
- 55 Over recent years, in a few schools, teachers' planning has become highly structured and there is often strict adherence to a particular published literacy scheme. While this type of planning provides a secure framework for teaching, and the consistent use of a scheme aids progression, at times this practice can limit the scope of pupils' learning, particularly in developing pupils' creativity and meeting the needs of more able and talented pupils. In a minority of schools in traditional Welsh-speaking areas, curriculum planning does not take enough account of the particular learning needs of pupils who do not speak Welsh as a first language fluently. The challenge in such schools is to enable younger pupils to become fluent speakers as quickly as possible through an initial emphasis on well-planned oral development, which includes opportunities for pupils to view and listen to a range of stimuli. In a few schools, these pupils are introduced to reading and, especially, writing tasks prematurely.
- 56 In effective schools, there is good continuity with pupils' earlier experiences so that pupils build progressively on what they already know and become increasingly independent in using their reading and writing skills. In some instances, schools have found it helpful to adopt the same principles for curriculum planning and a

similar format from nursery to Year 2. In a majority of schools, there is not enough consideration of a range of reading and writing work to cater for different learning styles, including planning learning challenges that are appealing to boys and providing opportunities for social interaction that girls often prefer.

- 57 In many schools, staff recognise that pupils need to learn a range of reading strategies, including phonics, 'look and say' and reading for meaning. Our report 'Improving the learning and teaching of early reading skills' refers to research and inspection evidence that endorses phonics as an important skill in learning to read. However, in addition to engaging in the mechanics of decoding words, readers also need to be able to make sense of what they read. Gaining phonic skills is one of a range of strategies that pupils need to help them read. There is more information about phonics in the report on 'Improving the learning and teaching of early reading skills'.
- 58 Many schools provide good opportunities for pupils to build on their existing phonic knowledge as well as learn how to use punctuation when reading. As a result, many pupils develop as fluent, accurate and expressive readers. The most effective schools ensure the work helps pupils to become increasingly aware of different types of books and materials, including plays, poems and stories from a range of cultures, non-fiction resources, dictionaries and ICT-based materials. A few schools do not help pupils to gain a wide enough range of decoding strategies, such as using their knowledge of grammar, reading on and checking the overall sense of the passage.
- 59 Most schools have attractive well-stocked book corners in classrooms and many schools have a library. These resources foster reading both for pleasure and learning. In the most effective schools, staff plan for pupils to have regular access to the library, such as a weekly session with their class teacher where pupils can enjoy choosing books and are taught research skills. Inspection evidence shows that in a minority of English-medium schools and a few Welsh-medium schools, there is insufficient planning for the development of pupils' information-retrieval skills. As a result, pupils do not progressively acquire the skills they need to make use of a range of sources of information.
- 60 Systematic planning of writing activities helps pupils learn the grammar and characteristic structures of different writing genres, including recounting, descriptive, instructional, explanatory and narrative writing. These aspects are a strong feature of the work of effective schools. Only a minority of schools plan well for pupils to learn to write for an audience that is wider and more varied than the people within the immediate school community. This work can help pupils to understand important writing skills, for example, the need to use a more formal style in certain situations or how to explain something familiar to a stranger. In the majority of schools, the most frequently addressed audience is the teacher. Pupils need to use and develop their writing skills in authentic situations where there are audiences other than the teacher.
- 61 The most effective schools provide good opportunities for pupils to extend their writing and produce work in detail, as part of their work in English and Welsh and in subjects across the curriculum. In these schools, staff have high and demanding expectations resulting in pupils writing independently at length with confidence, fluency and accuracy. Opportunities to plan, draft and review their writing extend

pupils' understanding of writing as a process. In many schools, pupils' planning is often oral or pictorial at first and later may move to frameworks that help them organise and develop the content of their work. In a few schools, pupils do not have enough opportunities to plan and review their work in order to improve it.

- 62 In a few schools, teachers set writing tasks that become formulaic, repetitive and boring for pupils. For example, the too frequent use of forms of writing such as 'news' can limit originality and creativity as well as reduce opportunities for pupils to write in different forms and genres. Also, teachers do not promote the notion of authorship to help pupils to see themselves as writers. In a minority of schools, there is not enough writing effort demanded of pupils, which affects their progress and capacity to improve. In particular, an over-use of commercial and teacher-produced worksheets reduces opportunities for pupils to write at length or independently because they are often only required to write a single word or short sentence.
- 63 The ability to spell easily and automatically enables pupils to become writers who can communicate better. Many schools plan carefully for pupils to develop their spelling skills and knowledge of grammar. Schools usually provide weekly spelling lists for pupils to learn, but often, despite achieving well in tests, not all pupils spell these words accurately in their writing. Learning to spell is not just about memorising a list of words. Pupils need to acquire and apply different strategies, including visual patterns, sound sequences, knowledge of graphophonic relationships¹² and meaning. Approaches, such as learning how to generalise and look for patterns and relationships, are essential elements of learning to spell.
- 64 Many schools give good attention to developing pupils' handwriting to help them present their work clearly, but, as with spelling, not all pupils go on to write neatly and legibly. Pupils who find handwriting difficult often struggle to replicate their oral ideas in writing, which is a source of frustration for them. Inspection evidence indicates that, in many schools, pupils have difficulties with spelling and handwriting and need frequent opportunities to secure their knowledge of:
- sound-symbol relationships and phonological awareness¹³;
 - spelling patterns;
 - word families;
 - the accurate spelling of key and familiar words so that these skills become automatic;
 - how to produce letters and words that are regular in size and shape; and
 - how to use the conventions of lower case and capital letters consistently and accurately.

¹² Letters and words and their associated sounds

¹³ Awareness of sounds within words, such as the ability to segment component sounds

- 65 Research shows that learners think that spelling is one of the hardest parts of learning to write. Schools where pupils' spelling is accurate provide clear guidance that teachers use consistently and link the teaching of spelling with the teaching of handwriting. Teachers encourage pupils to keep personalised word banks or spelling journals, teach spelling rules and use a range of learning approaches such as 'look, cover, write and check' that support pupils' progress. Staff are also vigilant in preventing pupils' spelling errors becoming established because it is often much more difficult to correct established spelling errors later on.
- 66 Strategies that have helped pupils to improve their handwriting and communicate their meaning effectively include:
- helping pupils to hold a pencil comfortably so that writing is easier for them;
 - providing individual support and regular practice; and
 - being clear about when there is a need for neat handwriting.
- 67 Resources such as the interactive whiteboard (IWB) help staff to model handwriting and provide a clear visual image for pupils.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The teaching of reading and writing

- 68 Teaching pupils to read and write accurately and fluently with confidence and understanding is crucial in helping them to achieve high standards, as well as giving them opportunities for success at school.
- 69 The quality of teaching in English and Welsh for most five to seven year olds is good. In a few schools, teaching has outstanding features, inspiring pupils so that they are enthusiastic learners who enjoy language and literature work. In these schools, pupils gain very secure and well-developed reading and writing skills that help them to achieve their full potential across the curriculum.
- 70 Effective teaching of English and Welsh links oracy, reading and writing, which help pupils understand that these language modes are interdependent. When teachers demonstrate language skills explicitly, pupils are helped to understand and apply what they have learnt for themselves. In Welsh-medium schools, 'viewing and listening to'¹⁴ a range of visual and audio-visual stimuli are particularly important elements that help pupils gain language skills at this stage.
- 71 In most schools, teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to gain reading skills. Teachers model reading, tell and re-tell familiar stories and provide good-quality texts by different authors. Pupils also benefit from reading alone and together. In the most effective schools, teaching also emphasises how authors compose their stories, helps pupils to evaluate critically how authors achieve their purpose and gives time for pupils to reflect on and respond to texts. These aspects are all critical to the development of pupils' own writing skills.
- 72 Most pupils have good opportunities to read regularly, and staff monitor their progress and achievements carefully. Over recent years, the use of 'big books' for sharing with groups and classes, and approaches such as 'guided reading' with groups of pupils of similar reading abilities, have become common ways of discussing texts, developing reading skills and providing regular reading practice. Case studies 1 and 2 in Appendix 1 provide examples of high-quality reading sessions using these approaches. In most schools, pupils with additional learning needs benefit from very frequent individual reading sessions with an adult, which helps them to make good progress. In a very few schools, all pupils read very regularly to staff, but there is not enough emphasis on helping pupils to gain and use a wide range of decoding strategies. Discussion about the text is sometimes brief and superficial.
- 73 Effective teaching of different kinds of writing involves modelling the process, which allows pupils to see the processes writers use. As teachers illustrate these procedures, pupils see that writing is an interactive process. They become aware of the process of editing and develop confidence in using these processes themselves. Many schools also successfully scaffold and support pupils' writing by providing writing frames, suggested sentence starters and story beginnings and endings.

¹⁴ The National Curriculum Orders for Welsh in key stage 1

- 74 Accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar are essential to communicate meaning to a reader. In schools where pupils' writing skills are good or better, staff teach these skills explicitly. In many schools, teachers help pupils develop an understanding of grammar through their reading. Case study 1 in Appendix 1 provides an example of a guided reading activity, which includes a focus on the teaching of grammar.
- 75 Good writing by pupils is usually because of a powerful stimulus and the writing that results is relevant to their needs and interests. In many schools, the main audience for pupils' work is the teacher. When pupils write for a range of readers, including their peers, themselves and others, they can gain a deeper understanding of the specific requirements of the writing, for example, writing instructions for their peers on a range of practical tasks. Case study 3 in Appendix 1 describes how pupils had real reasons for writing following a visit to a café and as a result produced high-quality work. In a few schools, writing is often brief, routine and unimaginative. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to learn about different forms of writing and do not build well enough on what they can already do because work is not pitched or structured in a way that helps them to do this.
- 76 Inspection indicates that in a few schools in Welsh-speaking areas of Wales, some teachers, who have considerable experience of largely teaching pupils who speak Welsh as a first-language, find it difficult to adjust to teaching Welsh to pupils who are not from Welsh-speaking backgrounds. They work hard with these pupils but tend to assume that the same approaches traditionally used with fluent Welsh speakers will also succeed with those who are not.

Assessing reading and writing

- 77 The way that teachers assess reading and writing has improved steadily over recent years. Schools use a range of assessment data to track pupils' progress in English and Welsh. Judging pupils' performance consistently against characteristics of progression is particularly important in planning the next stage of learning. Usually, schools maintain portfolios of samples of pupils' written work that are annotated, to help staff make reliable and consistent judgements about pupils' performance and progress.
- 78 In day-to-day classroom practice, most teachers use a range of approaches to assess reading and writing. These approaches include assessing the learning outcomes of pupils in lessons, such as after a guided reading session, or responding to pupils' written work. Staff also use commercial assessment tests that assess aspects of pupils' reading and writing skills, such as reading comprehension and spelling ability. Schools often use additional assessments to help teachers to diagnose a pupil's particular literacy difficulty.

- 79 Many teachers involve pupils more by using techniques such as assessment for learning. A key principle of this technique is that pupils should know where they are, where they need to go and how best to get there. This type of formative assessment focuses on the pupil's achievements and ways in which he or she can move forward. In effective schools, the approach has three key elements:
- good questioning techniques by the teacher;
 - clear feedback to pupils; and
 - the involvement of pupils in self-assessment and peer assessment.
- 80 More schools are involving pupils in setting targets to improve their performance. This target-setting works best when teachers draw on their knowledge of the small steps that constitute progress in reading and writing at this stage and, with the pupil, tailor the targets to the needs of the individual. In the best practice, the pupil and teacher agree the choice of targets together and the targets are expressed in accessible ways. On a day-to-day basis, this helps pupils know which skills to practise and develop, such as 'I am learning to write more and use two or three ideas' or 'I am learning to use a full stop at the end of a sentence'. More schools are providing pupils with opportunities to assess their own and others' work, but this approach is not yet well established in most schools.

Meeting the needs of pupils

- 81 In many schools, teachers are increasingly aware of pupils who are not making the expected progress because they track pupils' progress more systematically and use and analyse data more fully than 10 years ago.

Tackling the underachievement of boys

- 82 In Wales, at seven years of age, girls attain higher standards than boys in English and Welsh. While girls also do better than boys in mathematics and science, the difference in their achievements in these subjects, about 3%, is much less marked. Generally, more boys than girls have trouble learning English and Welsh. These difficulties can affect boys' access to learning and limit their performance across all areas of the curriculum.
- 83 Boys' underachievement is a complex issue because there are many interlinking factors. These factors include gender, cultural, social and emotional aspects that affect pupil preferences and influence teachers' perceptions as well as pupils' behaviour. Estyn's report on 'Closing the gap between boys' and girls' attainment in schools' (2008) includes more information on the factors that influence the extent to which pupils realise their potential.
- 84 Inspection evidence shows that there is little difference between boys' and girls' achievements in reading and writing in a very few schools. In these schools, teachers understand the characteristics and behaviours of individual boys very well. They skilfully develop oracy, reading and writing skills together, so that pupils see that they are connected and are tools for thinking and communication. The writing tasks are varied and interesting and there is a careful balance between narrative forms (imaginative stories) and other types of writing. Many boys find writing more interesting when they are asked to 'write instructions to play a game' (procedural writing), 'write about a visit to the park' (recounting), 'produce information about a frog' (report writing) or 'write about how an invention worked' (explaining). In these schools, teachers also provide a very wide range of books and materials because they recognise that boys may not have access to these at home. They make certain that the resources will appeal to avid and reluctant young readers.
- 85 Research and inspection evidence indicates that effective learning and teaching of reading and writing includes:
- teaching that takes account of boys' learning styles, for example, using play and active learning approaches such as music, drama and role play and incorporating inquiry as a basis for authentic reading and writing activities;
 - providing frequent opportunities to use talk to discuss and share ideas and understanding, before, during and after reading and writing;
 - explicit teaching and modelling of reading and writing skills, such as in guided reading and shared writing sessions;

- providing structured and meaningful reading and writing tasks that are explained clearly;
- avoiding an over-emphasis on narrative forms of reading and writing, a genre often less appealing to boys;
- using stimulating resources to engage all interests, such as a very wide range of literary and non-literary materials and ICT;
- close monitoring of pupils' work and clear feedback that explains what pupils are doing well and how they can improve; and
- using positive strategies that build pupils' self-esteem and reward effort and good work.

86 Traditionally, there are very few male role models among teachers of five to seven year olds. Effective primary schools find ways to provide contact with male role models who pupils see valuing and enjoying reading and writing. These schools also secure the involvement of parents who help to support and promote boys' reading. In these ways, pupils gain confidence and are helped to be successful in English and Welsh. This is particularly important for boys, as from an early age they need to see themselves as readers and writers.

Meeting the needs of less-able pupils

87 Overall, most schools are meeting the needs of less-able pupils well. There is usually particularly good support for pupils with special educational needs and most individual educational plans (IEPs) identify the reading and writing skills pupils need to acquire and the steps they need to take to achieve these goals.

88 In many primary schools, there are well-established identification and tracking procedures to identify the need for support as early as possible and to monitor pupils' progress. These schools make good use of ongoing assessment so that pupils move in and out of interventions with work that is well-matched to their learning needs. Support for reading is generally well-embedded in the work of schools. Support for aspects of writing, beyond spelling and handwriting skills, is often less well established. In particular, there is often less emphasis on the compositional aspects of writing, such as the selection, ordering and development of ideas and information.

89 Effective schools use a wide range of intervention strategies with a proven track record to help pupils catch up with their peers. Over recent years, some of the most successful intervention programmes, many of them funded and supported by Basic Skills Cymru, the Welsh Assembly Government or the local authority, have included:

- oracy programmes that help develop pupils' speaking and listening skills;
- 'Reading Recovery' programmes;
- Catch-Up/Dyfal Donc reading programmes;

- short literacy-acceleration courses;
- spelling programmes to tackle specific difficulties; and
- individual and group programmes provided by learning support assistants.

90 There is a growing emphasis on developing pupils' oracy skills in most support programmes at this stage, which rightly reflects the importance of establishing these skills for five to seven year olds.

Meeting the needs of more-able and talented pupils

- 91 Increasingly, staff in more schools are aware of the need to make better provision for more-able and talented pupils. Effective schools provide these pupils with opportunities for enrichment and extension that go beyond those provided for the general cohort of pupils. In these schools, staff provide more demanding writing tasks and a wider challenging range of reading material. In a few schools, teachers plan activities that provide great stimulation for these pupils; they challenge their thinking through probing questions and place a strong emphasis on a problem-solving approach to learning.
- 92 Most schools have produced a policy to inform practice. However, some of these policies focus only on extension activities and different types of homework and do not give enough guidance about learning and teaching styles and matching provision to individual needs. Frequently, this area is not a high enough priority for schools.
- 93 In a majority of schools, more-able and talented pupils are often required to complete more of the same work that others do, such as undertaking longer writing exercises. This type of activity does not do enough to challenge or extend these pupils' skills.
- 94 There are mis-conceptions or narrow interpretations of what defines more-able and talented pupils in a significant minority of schools, which hinder the identification of and support for, these pupils. While there is no universally agreed definition, in Wales, the term 'more-able and talented' encompasses approximately 20% of the total school population¹⁵. Importantly, the identification of more-able and talented pupils is linked to their context, regardless of how these pupils compare to more-able and talented pupils in other schools. This means that in every school there will be a group of pupils who require greater breadth and depth of learning activities.

Meeting the needs of pupils for whom English and/or Welsh is an additional language

- 95 The number of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) has increased sharply in a significant number of schools over recent years as Wales has become increasingly diverse.
- 96 Local authorities employ specialist EAL teachers and multilingual support assistants, and mainstream teachers are generally provided with well-planned advice and training to help them to meet the needs of this rapidly increasing number of pupils

¹⁵ Meeting the Challenge Welsh Assembly Government Circular No: 006/2008

with EAL. This support has helped pupils to receive specialist teaching and support in mainstream classes. The Welsh Assembly Government's five stage model of language acquisition, which ranges from 'New to English or Welsh' to 'Fluent' helps schools to identify each pupil's stage of language acquisition and the kind of work and support he/she will need to develop their English or Welsh skills. At the same time, this assessment may establish any additional learning needs.

- 97 In a few schools, staff cannot make the best provision for pupils with EAL because assessment of pupils' language needs does not occur as soon as they arrive in school.
- 98 The most effective learning for pupils with EAL occurs when schools:
- help pupils to develop their listening comprehension, which precedes reading comprehension;
 - integrate language learning across the curriculum;
 - ensure that pupils hear teachers and peers modelling language so that relevant new vocabulary is matched to pupils' understanding;
 - encourage pupils to use talk to develop their thinking and response to what they read;
 - use approaches such as shared and guided reading and writing that scaffold pupils' learning, help them develop vocabulary, use new words in context and build their confidence and self-esteem;
 - use culturally appropriate texts and provide support to build knowledge and understanding of unfamiliar aspects;
 - explicitly teach writing conventions to pupils for whom the language conventions and culture are unfamiliar;
 - let pupils have the freedom to use their own language when necessary;
 - provide pupils with opportunities to rehearse and organise their ideas orally and pictorially before writing and encourage collaborative/small group learning;
 - closely monitor pupils' developing language skills;
 - analyse a wide range of assessment data to identify and target support for pupils to prevent them underachieving; and
 - use the knowledge and skills of pupils with EAL to enrich the language and cultural environment of the classroom.

Partnership with parents

- 99 Gaining parents' active support can make an important contribution to pupils' reading and writing skills. Almost all schools have good links with parents and value the support and contribution they make to pupils' learning, such as listening to their child read. Usually, schools focus more on helping parents support the development of their child's reading skills. Although parents often support the learning of spelling lists, very few schools share as much information about developing and promoting pupils' writing as they do for reading.
- 100 Most schools provide a range of helpful information for parents about reading. Guidance and advice such as 'Find a quiet part of your home' and 'Don't be anxious if your child has difficulty' help parents to provide a suitable domestic and social context for reading. Many schools also hold meetings and workshops to explain to parents how they teach reading and how parents can help their child. Many schools use 'reading diaries' for teachers and parents to exchange day-to-day comments about pupils' reading, which can also help pupils' progress. Schools often host events such as book fairs to highlight the range of exciting resources that can enthuse young readers.
- 101 In a few cases, schools provide opportunities for parents to observe teachers working with pupils on developing reading and writing skills. In these instances, feedback from parents has been very positive. Welsh-medium schools provide support for non-Welsh speaking parents of pupils learning Welsh as a first language, so that these parents can help their child in learning a different language. However, on occasion, this support does not focus enough on helping parents to support their child's oral fluency in Welsh, for example by providing guidance on how to reinforce language patterns and the vocabulary of work done in school. This work is particularly important with pupils of English-speaking backgrounds as it can extend the opportunities for them to practise their developing skills.
- 102 Many schools often use parent helpers to support pupils' work in the classroom, particularly reading. In one reading partnership project undertaken each year by a school, parents receive training in how to identify and reinforce good reading behaviours and how to use specific 'praise' techniques. The school uses this approach very successfully to support pupils in Year 2 whose reading ability is lower than their chronological age. A few schools have used funding from projects, such as Raising Attainment and Individual Standards in Education (RAISE), successfully. In these cases, teachers work with groups of parents to show them how to use reading games and internet resources to support their children's literacy development. Oracy play days, funded by Basic Skills Cymru, for parents and their children, help to develop pupils' spoken language and promote important links between oracy, reading and writing.
- 103 A few schools that have found it difficult to attract parents to the traditional 'parents evenings' have worked hard to reach out and involve parents in other ways. By developing 'curriculum mornings', which are drop-in sessions during the day, staff have found one approach that is popular. Parents are invited to join their child's class and get involved in some of the reading activities. This approach has had a big impact on some parents' understanding of their child's learning and strengthened home-school partnerships.

Leadership and management

- 104 High standards in reading and writing are usually achieved when there is strong and influential leadership and management by the headteacher, close collaboration and teamwork between the subject leader and staff and a relentless drive to raise standards.
- 105 In many schools, the expertise and leadership of the English and Welsh subject leaders have contributed significantly to the effective learning and teaching of reading and writing. In a majority of schools, these subject leaders show dynamic leadership, knowledge and commitment. They have high levels of subject knowledge, inspire and support colleagues and monitor work to ensure that pupils have a full, rich and challenging experience of language and literature. In a few schools, outstanding work by learning support assistants (LSAs) has also contributed greatly to the standards pupils achieve. Case study 4 shows how LSAs in one school have very successfully supported pupils' progress.
- 106 Inspection evidence shows that the best leaders create an ethos in which staff expect pupils to succeed in English and Welsh. They establish a common understanding of how to teach reading and writing effectively. Strong links with the previous setting that pupils attended, common approaches to the learning and teaching of reading and writing for five to seven year olds and continuity with key stage 2 ensure pupils receive consistent messages about language learning. In this way, pupils progress successfully and transfer smoothly to key stage 2.
- 107 Systematic monitoring in many schools enable senior managers to make certain that the learning and teaching of reading and writing are as good as they can be. Evaluation helps staff to judge the impact of literacy initiatives and the effect of continuous professional development on the standards of pupils' work. Case study 5 in Appendix 1 shows how a senior manager brought about improvements in English in a primary school by applying these processes effectively.
- 108 Despite the good work of leaders and managers, standards of seven year olds have remained at about the same level for nearly 10 years. Continuing to improve the outcomes for pupils in Wales remains a key priority. Effective schools have characteristics in line with the best practice in reading and writing identified in this report. Critically, in these schools, staff engage in sharing this practice, which has helped senior managers to eradicate variations in the quality of work between classes.
- 109 Sharing effective programmes of action is central to success in raising standards. As schools develop broader professional learning communities, supported by the School Effectiveness Framework, these arrangements may provide new opportunities for staff to engage more widely in sharing professional learning and raise performance in schools. An encouraging starting point for this work is the networking opportunities that already exist in many local authorities and among families of schools to share aspects of innovative practice and ways of engaging young readers and writers.

- 110 Commonly, over the past 10 years, reading has been the greatest priority for development in school improvement planning. However, schools often continue to focus only on reading when standards of writing in the school are lower. Increasingly, schools are identifying oracy as a priority because of its fundamental importance to reading and writing and because more and more children start school with less well developed oracy skills than previously.

The work of local authorities

- 111 Local authorities have a key strategic role in ensuring that schools give priority to developing pupils' literacy skills. All authorities have a literacy strategy and provide a range of advisory and curriculum support for improving standards in English and Welsh.
- 112 The most effective literacy strategies include, explicitly, the action that the authority and schools will take to improve teaching and standards of reading and writing. Clear, long-term improvement plans, based on a good understanding of trends and performance in individual schools, help to determine progress. Frequent monitoring and thorough evaluation make certain that the learning and teaching of reading and writing are as good as they can be.
- 113 Most authorities use designated literacy advisers to provide support for schools. Overall, these advisers provide good support and resources to help schools give priority to developing pupils' literacy skills. Case study 6 in Appendix 1 shows how advisers in a mainly Welsh-speaking area provide a range of literacy support for schools.
- 114 In many authorities, there is a wide range of initiatives to support literacy work, such as 'Reading Recovery', Catch-Up/Dyfal Donc, Talking Partners, literacy enhancement groups, Family Learning programmes and Family Literacy schemes and the RAISE programme. Where initiatives for five to seven year olds are most successful, they build well on earlier learning programmes, such as Language and Play (LAP) and SureStart, which maximises the impact of work. In most authorities, support for English and Welsh links effectively to support for basic skills.
- 115 Authorities make use of resources and grant programmes from a range of sources, for example, from the Welsh Assembly Government including resources made available through the Better Schools Fund, RAISE and implementation of the Basic Skills strategy. In the best cases, these resources and grant programmes are targeted carefully to improve reading and writing where standards need improving most.
- 116 In a very few authorities, outstanding support for literacy in schools has contributed to significant and sustained improvements in the standards of pupils' reading and writing skills at seven years of age. In these authorities, highly-skilled literacy advisers work very effectively with schools to support, challenge and improve practice.

- 117 Over the past 10 years, pupils and staff in schools in Newport local authority have benefited from the very good literacy strategy, high-quality advisory support and training programme, and support networks for staff with responsibility for literacy. In this authority, there is an effective range of catch-up and literacy acceleration programmes for underachieving pupils. In particular, the authority targets support at schools and groups of pupils that are not achieving well. Together these measures have played a key part in putting the authority's literacy strategy into action and raising and sustaining high standards in literacy in key stage 1. More recently, in Caerphilly local authority, high-quality advisory work and initiatives to improve levels of literacy, especially writing, are helping schools to raise standards. In this authority, the percentage of seven year olds achieving level 2 or above in English has risen from 75.6 to 81.8, which is an improvement of 6.2 percentage points compared with the all-Wales average improvement of 1.3 percentage points (81.1% to 82.4%).
- 118 All local authorities use a wide range of evidence, including performance data and inspection outcomes, to evaluate schools' performance, particularly in English and Welsh as core subjects in the National Curriculum. However, not all authorities analyse specific data for reading and writing in sufficient detail to help them identify schools most in need of improvement in these key aspects of literacy.
- 119 Most authorities have given a lot of attention to supporting schools in understanding and addressing the differences between boys' and girls' achievement in literacy. Increasingly, local authorities have some good initiatives to help schools motivate more able and talented pupils, but not all local authorities have ways to measure the impact of their policies on the performance of more able and talented pupils.

Appendix 1: Case studies which exemplify best practice in improving pupils' reading and writing skills

Case study 1: A guided reading session

Background

In a mixed Year 1 and Year 2 class, pupils have twice-weekly guided reading sessions with their class teacher. Pupils are organised into groups according to their reading ability. The teacher arranges to work with the group for around 25 minutes. She is able to focus her attention on them because the rest of the class work independently on the well-matched work she has already prepared for them.

Strategy

Sessions usually begin with a revision of the story, such as discussion of the text and title and what the 'blurb' of the book reveals. The teacher draws pupils' attention to the need to scan ahead for tricky words and shows them how they can use punctuation to aid reading and expression.

Pupils take turns to read aloud and other pupils in the group know that they must follow the text closely. The teacher's questioning prompts pupils to reflect on and interpret the events in the story. She gives pupils time to consider their responses and encourages them to go back to the text to seek answers. She makes pupils aware of grammatical features, for example, identifying words with 'ed' at the end that represent the past tense and identifying the way that adjectives give more information to the reader. She skilfully draws pupils' attention to the way the author uses words for effect, such as the use of alliteration in 'flapping flippers' and the choice of words like 'thud' and 'splat', which echo sounds associated with their meaning. She discusses how pupils can use the stylistic features of this text in their own writing.

Outcome

Pupils benefit from regular opportunities to enjoy, read and discuss texts in detail. Sessions skilfully combine the teaching of reading and writing so that pupils make very good progress in developing these skills. The teacher uses these sessions to gain valuable information about pupils' reading and comprehension skills.

Case study 2: A shared reading session

Background

In a Welsh-medium Year 2 class, pupils and teacher share a big book together on the carpet. The teacher wants pupils to extend their vocabulary and improve their knowledge of story structure. The work will be used as a stimulus for pupils' writing later when they will re-cast the story.

Strategy

The teacher begins by focusing on the cover and title of the book and she introduces new words relevant to the context, extending pupils' growing vocabulary. There is extensive oral discussion and development of ideas and information, which prepares pupils very well for their written work later. After reading and discussing the text, the teacher returns to specific parts of the story to consider word patterns, the author's use of a repeating phrase for effect, and the use of punctuation, such as question and exclamation marks that aid reading. Focusing on events in the story, the teacher skilfully uses open-ended questions to develop pupils' understanding of story structure and to give them opportunities to use and reinforce their vocabulary.

Outcome

The carefully structured discussion enables pupils to rehearse and develop their ideas orally before writing. The focus on grammar and punctuation helps to reinforce pupils' learning of Welsh. The attention to story structure means that all pupils are very well prepared for the writing activity that follows and succeed in the task.

Case study 3: Providing real purposes for writing

Background

In a primary school, the subject leader for English encourages colleagues to use real experiences as a stimulus for pupils' writing. She knows that introducing writing in real-world contexts helps pupils to focus on the purpose and audience and provides genuine reasons for writing. This philosophy guides the school's approach to literacy.

Strategy

A teacher arranges for her Year 2 pupils to visit the local café as part of their topic on food. The pupils meet the owner and talk to the staff and customers. They enjoy trying on the uniform, tasting the food and learn how to operate the till. Pupils ask the questions they have prepared as well as a great many more that arise spontaneously from their experience.

Back at school, pupils and their teacher talk at length about the visit. They discuss ways of responding to the experience, such as writing a thank-you letter to the owner, producing a child-friendly menu for the café and designing an advertisement for the school notice board. After agreeing the kinds of writing that will take place, the pupils and teacher determine the success criteria against which they will evaluate their writing. In this class, the teacher encourages peer assessment. When the writing is finished, pupils work with their partner, identifying what is good about their work and where they need to improve it.

Outcome

Pupils' writing is of a high quality. They organise, structure and present their writing with a strong sense of purpose and audience. Pupils gain and use specific vocabulary in a context that means something in the world outside school.

Case study 4: Using learning support assistants to support pupils

Background

In a Welsh-medium school, nearly all pupils come from homes where Welsh is not the first language. Pupils have limited opportunities to develop Welsh language skills in their community.

Strategy

The school uses learning support assistants (LSAs) funded from the school budget to deliver a focused literacy programme for specific pupils who have difficulty with reading and writing. All pupils are screened using a commercial test which gives helpful diagnostic information that staff use well to inform the teaching programme. Usually, pupils with reading delays of a year or more receive intensive one to one support by LSAs for 15 to 20 minutes three times a week.

These sessions provide pupils with opportunities to practise and reinforce their oracy skills as well as develop their reading skills. Teachers and LSAs work very closely together to plan and assess pupils' work and progress and to maintain strong links in the other work that pupils do in the classroom. Regular use of the motivating effect of ICT supports the programme well. Parents are kept well-informed about the programme and the progress of their child at meetings that are held at the beginning and end of the programme.

Outcome

Pupils develop confidence and make good progress, gaining and securing their reading and writing skills, which help their work across the curriculum.

Case study 5: Monitoring and evaluating standards of pupils' written work

Background

In a small primary school, the headteacher has responsibility for English. As part of her monitoring of work in the school, she collects samples of writing from each class. Although pupils already achieve good standards, she is convinced that they can achieve more.

Strategy

From the scrutiny of work, the headteacher and staff identify three important aspects of work for improvement. These are to:

- extend the range of genres for pupils' writing;
- make certain that exercises on spelling, grammar and punctuation are relevant, interesting and sufficiently demanding of all pupils; and
- reduce the use of worksheets, which are restricting pupils' independent writing skills.

Over the year, staff training focuses on improvements in the areas identified. Teachers revise their planning so that pupils have more opportunities to write in different genres. They make certain that pupils have interesting and challenging writing tasks and regular opportunities to write for different purposes and audiences. In fortnightly staff meetings, teachers share samples of pupils' work, which helps to show how well the work is progressing. Teachers also visit classrooms to observe learning and teaching and share good practice. At the end of the year, the headteacher collects samples of pupils' written work and analyses the work.

Outcome

The headteacher's scrutiny of written work reveals that there is now a far greater range of writing throughout the school. The evidence includes: letter writing, stories, recipes, instructions, leaflets, fairy tales, poems, riddles and posters. Encouragingly, there are also wider benefits in that teachers are providing more opportunities for pupils to write in a range of forms in other areas of the curriculum.

From the quality of pupils' writing, the headteacher identifies that pupils are more confident and effective writers. They make ambitious vocabulary choices, show greater control over the composition of their writing and write for different purposes and audiences. There is far less evidence of 'decontextualised' exercises that do little to develop pupils' writing skills. The scrutiny also reveals that there is less use of worksheets as teachers are more discerning about when to use these. Staff recognise that a reduction in the use of worksheets has helped to extend the length of pupils' written responses.

Case study 6: A local authority initiative to support literacy work in schools

Background

In a largely Welsh-speaking area, several local authorities use the services of an organisation to provide support for schools. This organisation has produced a clearly defined policy and guidance framework for each language skill and language development overall. The policies and frameworks are very influential in schools, helping to ensure consistency and planning for continuity and progression.

Strategy

The current range of literacy work for teachers of pupils aged five to seven years is well informed by the philosophy of the Foundation Phase and the Skills Framework, as well as the principles of assessment for learning. Skilled advisers place a strong emphasis on the need for schools to provide rich, broad and varied literacy work as an important means of developing pupils' learning of reading and writing. They balance this work alongside developing the skills of phonics, grammatical knowledge, accurate spelling and good presentation. Most recently, work has included:

- enhancing school libraries and training for staff on effective use of the library;
- guidance on using the outdoor environment to promote literacy;
- the short-term secondment of highly-skilled teachers to the organisation to share best practice and provide support for specific initiatives in schools;
- the production of exemplar video material for schools to use to help improve the quality of teaching;
- provision of a range of stimulating multi-media resources and the translation of highly-popular work into Welsh; and
- the development of a range of resources, including ICT, to be appealing to boys.

Outcome

Advisers have clearly defined and specific responsibilities, which successfully translate into effective teamwork to support schools. Schools benefit from good-quality support and resources, which helps them to raise standards.

Appendix 2: Toolkit for self-evaluation and improvement in schools

Improving the learning and teaching of reading and writing can make a real difference to the standards pupils' achieve in English and Welsh as well as in all other areas of the curriculum. The key questions that follow may assist leaders and managers to review areas of work and drive improvement further.

Curriculum planning

- Does planning for the development of communication skills occur across the whole curriculum and support bilingual development?
- Is there a high-quality scheme of work for English and Welsh that integrates the learning and teaching of oracy, reading and writing with clear teaching objectives and the specific knowledge, understanding and skills that pupils should gain at text, sentence and word levels?
- Does the planning provide a good balance between structured activities for direct teaching of reading and writing skills and active approaches, including play-based learning?
- Does the planning provide for the development of pupils' thinking, planning, creative and problem-solving skills?
- Does the planning build effectively on pupils' previous learning and develop progressively through to key stage 2?
- Does the work progressively increase the level of challenge and include a range of tasks so that tasks are well-matched to the needs of pupils, including those with literacy difficulties and those who are more-able and talented?
- Is there planning to ensure that pupils acquire a range of decoding strategies to help them become fluent readers and use punctuation to aid expression?
- Is there a strong focus on pupils' understanding and comprehension of what they read?
- Are there regular planned opportunities for pupils to use the library and gain information retrieval skills?
- Do pupils write for different purposes and in a range of forms using paper and ICT for composition?
- Is there systematic planning to ensure pupils learn about the characteristic structures of writing genre and the features that writers use to create particular effects?

- Are writing tasks interesting, varied and appealing to all pupils, including boys? See case study 3 for an example of good practice.
- Do pupils have regular opportunities to write for a wider audience than the teacher? See case study 3 for an example of good practice.
- Do pupils have opportunities to plan, draft and review their writing, alone and with others?
- Do writing tasks and activities demand sufficient writing effort and enable pupils to write at length? See case study 5 for an example of good practice.
- Do pupils have opportunities to gain a range of strategies to help them spell and punctuate accurately?
- Does the planning show how all staff, including learning support assistants, will contribute to the development of pupils' literacy skills?
- Is the development of reading and writing skills strongly embedded in all subject schemes of work and lesson plans?

Teaching and assessment

- Is the teaching dynamic and do staff share their enthusiasm for language and literature with pupils?
- Do staff have sound subject expertise and knowledge and use these effectively to help pupils develop and secure their skills in English and Welsh?
- Do staff link oral, reading and writing activities in lessons so that pupils learn that these modes are interdependent? See case studies 1 and 2 for examples of good practice.
- Do staff teach skills explicitly through demonstration and explanation and pupils have opportunities to apply what they have learnt for themselves? See case studies 1 and 2 for examples of good practice.
- Do staff scaffold pupils' learning through approaches such as shared and guided reading and writing?
- Are activities well matched to pupils' learning needs and abilities?
- Does teaching recognise and promote sharing information and ideas orally to aid thinking and responding?
- Is there good questioning and discussion, which stimulates pupils to think of ideas for themselves?

- Is there a clear focus on using talk and developing ideas orally in response to what pupils read?
- Do staff teach writing as a process of composition that includes planning, creating, revising, editing and sharing drafts with others?
- Is there shared writing so that pupils understand how writing involves different aspects of composition?
- Do staff recognise the powerful motivator of real audiences in writing well and helping pupils understand the specific purpose of writing tasks?
- Are there consistent approaches to the teaching of spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting?
- Do staff and learning support assistants work closely together to support pupils' learning needs, such as planning together and sharing assessment information? See case study 4 for an example of good practice.
- Do staff use motivating resources, including the library and ICT, to help pupils become enthusiastic readers and researchers of information?
- Can staff adjust and innovate successfully when there are changes in the language character of the school? For example, when there are growing numbers of pupils with EAL or an increased proportion of pupils from non-Welsh speaking homes in a school which teaches through the medium of Welsh?
- Do staff draw on 'learning to learn' strategies and develop thinking skills to enable pupils to become independent learners?
- Do staff make certain that pupils know the objectives of activities and tasks and what they are learning to achieve?
- Do staff make certain that assessment information informs day-to-day planning?
- Do staff use clear criteria and apply these consistently to judge pupils' progress?
- Is there close monitoring of pupils' progress in developing language skills, particularly fluency, accuracy and confidence?
- Do staff provide guidance and feedback to individual pupils so pupils know what they are learning and how well they are doing?
- Do staff involve pupils in the target-setting process, express targets in an accessible way and make certain that targets are visible and obvious reminders for pupils so that they can readily refer to them when working?
- Are there opportunities for pupils to assess their own and others' work?

Meeting the needs of pupils

- Are pupils who have difficulties with reading and writing identified at the earliest opportunity?
- Do pupils receive specialist teaching and support in mainstream classes to meet their needs and, where appropriate, in pairs and groups in separate language lessons?
- Is there close monitoring of pupils' work with specific support for pupils who need help with organising their work?
- Are all pupils helped to gain confidence in their literacy work and are they shown how to be successful, which is particularly important for boys as they need to see themselves as writers?
- Is there a clear focus on **which boys** are underachieving?
- Is there careful selection of materials, including fiction and non-fiction, media and moving image texts that appeal to boys and girls?
- Does the work for more-able and talented pupils stretch and challenge them so that they work to the highest level of their ability?

Partnership with parents

- Do parents receive sufficient information to help them support their child's reading and writing progress?
- Are there opportunities for parents and their children to benefit from language and literacy programmes?
- Is there well-planned and precise guidance to non-Welsh speaking parents of children who are taught in Welsh to help them support their child's Welsh language skill development?

Leadership and management

- Is the headteacher directly involved in driving up standards in reading and writing to give status to the work throughout the school and to ensure it is a whole-school priority? See case study 5 for an example of good practice.
- Does the school have a designated member of staff who can lead, advise, support and challenge work in literacy?
- Do leaders and managers make certain that there are high expectations for pupils' achievement, expressed as challenging individual, class and whole school targets?

- Is developing pupils' reading and writing skills a regular part of the school improvement plan and do managers maintain a well-informed overview of literacy work?
- Do senior managers have a well-planned programme to review and evaluate the impact of literacy initiatives and do they use the findings to plan for further improvement?
- Does the school target initiatives for improvement on the weaker aspects of reading and writing and for groups of pupils who make least progress in developing their reading or writing skills?
- Is there a regular audit of the range of pupils' work to make certain that all pupils have full, rich and challenging experiences of reading and writing?
- Do staff receive regular and relevant training for teaching reading and writing and are they involved in literacy initiatives?
- Does the school use a wide range of intervention strategies that have a proven track record so that pupils can be helped to catch up with their peers?
- Is there good deployment of support staff so that they make a full contribution to supporting pupils?
- Is there frequent monitoring and thorough evaluation to make certain that the learning and teaching of reading and writing are as good as they can be? See case study 5 for an example of good practice.
- Do staff engage widely in sharing good practice and professional learning to strengthen and extend their capacity for improvement?
- Does the authority have a well-developed, whole-authority literacy strategy to develop pupils' communication skills that includes, explicitly, the action that the LA and schools will take to improve teaching and standards of reading and writing?
- Is there a clear operational plan to improve reading and writing based on a good understanding of trends and performance in individual schools?
- Are resources from a range of sources, for example, from the authority, the Welsh Assembly Government and Basic Skills Cymru, carefully matched to improve reading and writing where standards need improving most?
- Does the authority provide a good range of guidance and exemplar materials for teaching and assessing reading and writing? See case study 6 for an example of good practice.

- Can schools access specialists who provide training and support to help them improve the teaching of reading and writing?
- Does the authority undertake frequent monitoring and thorough evaluation to make certain that the learning and teaching of reading and writing are as good as they can be?

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