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Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

Literacy in key stage 3: An interim report

January 2015

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Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.uk

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Introduction

This report is the second in a series, published in response to a request for advice in the Minister's annual remit letter to Estyn for 2013-2014. It looks at standards in literacy at key stage 3, and how a selection of secondary schools is developing pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum with a particular reference to the implementation, and impact of the first year of the literacy component of the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF). The LNF became a statutory requirement in all schools from September 2013. Appendix 1 of this report on literacy in key stage 3 contains case studies that exemplify good practice in schools.

The intended audience for this report includes the Welsh Government, headteachers and practitioners in schools, and officers and advisers of local authorities and regional consortia. It will also be of interest to teacher trainers and to church diocesan authorities.

Background

Over recent years, one of the common messages in the annual report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales has been that pupils need better literacy skills. These are skills that help pupils to make progress in other areas of the curriculum. Although pupils may attain well in tests and examinations in English and Welsh, they do not always transfer those skills to other subjects and contexts.

Every three years, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) surveys the educational achievement of 15-year-old pupils. This is organised by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The survey assesses pupils' skills in reading, mathematics and science. Wales took part in PISA surveys in 2006, 2009 and 2012. The reading performance in Wales in 2012 was lower than in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and lower than in most European countries.

From September 2013, as part of its National Literacy Programme, the Welsh Government introduced the statutory LNF. This replaces the developing communication and developing number across the curriculum components of the non-statutory Skills Framework for pupils from the Foundation Phase to the end of key stage 3. In the summer term of 2013, pupils from Year 2 to Year 9 took the first annual national reading and numeracy tests.

Prior to the introduction of the national reading tests, there was no common, standardised measure of pupils' literacy skills. Essential Skills Wales qualifications allowed pupils to gain a qualification in communication skills but, although these qualifications recognise pupils' achievement in these skills across the curriculum, they were not a reliable indicator of how well pupils apply those skills in different circumstances.

For this report, inspectors visited a representative sample of 21 secondary schools during late spring 2014. Thirteen of those schools were part of the baseline study 'Literacy in key stage 3' published in June 2012. The aim of this second interim report is to evaluate the effectiveness of literacy strategies used by schools and gauge how much progress they have made towards implementing the LNF since the first, baseline survey.

The recommendations for schools, local authorities and the Welsh Government, from the baseline survey were that:

Schools should:

- R1 make developing literacy skills a priority in improvement plans and schemes of work;
- R2 track and monitor the progress of all pupils, particularly those on intervention programmes and more able learners, to make sure that they make good progress across all key stages;
- R3 map opportunities for oracy, reading and writing across the curriculum, particularly in improving pupils' extended writing and the accuracy of their written work;
- R4 monitor and evaluate the impact of strategies for improving literacy; and
- R5 train teachers to plan more challenging opportunities in all subjects to develop pupils' higher-order reading and writing skills.

Local authorities should:

- R6 produce a well-developed literacy strategy and mechanisms to improve standards across the curriculum; and
- R7 support schools in training all staff to use effective literacy strategies, including sharing best practice between schools.

The Welsh Government should:

- R8 provide guidance and support for teachers to help them to implement the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework and develop literacy skills across the curriculum.

Main findings

- 1 In the last two years, standards in general were judged excellent in about one-in-nine secondary schools inspected, and good in close to two-in-five, which is similar to the previous two years. Pupils use their literacy skills well in these schools.
- 2 Although standards in English and Welsh first language at level 5 and above continue to rise, the standards of pupils' literacy remain much as they were two years ago at the time of the baseline survey. In the majority of schools inspected, and visited as part of the survey, the overall standard of pupils' literacy is adequate.
- 3 In a majority of the schools visited as part of the survey, the provision for the development of pupils' literacy skills is only adequate. Since the baseline survey, many schools have increased opportunities, across the curriculum, for pupils to produce extended writing. In most schools, there is an improved awareness among teachers of the need to develop pupils' reading and oral skills. However, the shape of provision overall remains similar to that reported in the baseline survey.
- 4 The LNF was introduced quickly, but progress in implementing the framework has been slower than expected for several reasons, including:
 - the short lead-in period not allowing schools time to prepare well enough;
 - the difficulties in accessing support due to a website that is not user-friendly;
 - insufficient access to training places;
 - a majority of schools not having a clear understanding of progression in standards of pupils' literacy; and
 - insufficient guidance on assessment including exemplification of standards of literacy and of test materials.
- 5 Nearly all the schools visited have made some progress in planning for the development of pupils' literacy skills since the baseline survey. These schools identify literacy as a whole-school priority and see the value of the LNF. In a minority of schools, literacy is included appropriately in subject development plans. Where there is still work to do, not all subjects include literacy in their plans and success criteria are vague and relate mainly to provision rather than to measureable outcomes (R1).
- 6 The assessment and tracking of pupils' literacy skills remain under-developed in most schools, other than for pupils who take part in specific intervention programmes, although most schools have suitable tracking systems to monitor progress in subjects (R2).
- 7 Many schools have mapped cross-curricular opportunities for the development of pupils' literacy skills, but few have made enough progress in quality assuring those opportunities, or in planning for progression in the development of pupils' skills.
- 8 A majority of schools have increased the expectation for pupils to complete more extended writing. However, the approaches to improving the quality and technical accuracy of pupils' writing are not applied consistently across the curriculum. The

teaching of writing remains underdeveloped in a minority of schools. The most frequent whole-school focus is on introducing a consistent approach to the marking of literacy. Having a whole-school approach to marking pupils' work has introduced greater consistency in practice, although it remains variable in many schools. (R3).

- 9 In a few schools, the development of pupils' literacy is better in subjects other than English or Welsh. In these schools, English and Welsh teachers take an overly literary approach to their subjects and focus too much on pupils' understanding and appreciation of the literary text rather than on developing specific literacy skills.
- 10 Many schools identify lesson observations and book scrutiny as the means to monitor and evaluate strategies for improving literacy. However, in many cases, these activities do not focus sharply enough on the impact of the provision. Teachers generally do not understand how to judge standards of literacy across the curriculum (R4).
- 11 A minority of schools have made good progress in developing pupils' higher-order reading skills, such as synthesis, inference, deduction and prediction. Usually, pupils make this progress in English, Welsh and humanities lessons. However, the majority of schools do not plan activities that consistently challenge more able pupils. A majority of staff continue to support the development of pupils' higher-order reading and writing skills through existing curriculum provision rather than in response to the LNF. This means that the provision for the development of reading and writing skills is not progressive and does not build on what pupils already know and understand (R5).
- 12 The quality and extent of the support for schools to develop pupils' literacy have been variable and have had limited impact. In a minority of schools, the local authority or consortium has provided training on reading behaviours, tactical teaching and the use of the LNF diagnostic tools. However, in a majority of schools, this support has not been available and there have been limited opportunities to share best practice with other schools. Many of the schools visited were dissatisfied with the support offered to them by the local authority and the regional consortium (R6 and R7).
- 13 Nearly all schools have a literacy co-ordinator, with a teaching background in English or Welsh and with suitable literacy skills. This is a higher proportion than reported in the baseline survey. Staff turnover is a challenge for schools and over half of the schools appointed their literacy co-ordinators within the last year. Many of these new co-ordinators are still settling into the post.
- 14 Annual national reading test results are available to schools to monitor the reading progress of all pupils. However, schools make limited use of these test results to plan learning experiences across the curriculum. In many schools, the information is available, but viewed as the property of the English or Welsh department rather than as a whole-school resource.

Recommendations

Schools should:

- R1 implement a progressive and well co-ordinated cross-curricular approach to developing pupils' literacy skills, in line with the expectations in the LNF;
- R2 track and monitor the progression in pupils' literacy skills against the end-of-year expectations of the LNF;
- R3 encourage English and Welsh subject experts to take the lead in improving links between subjects to support a consistent, progressive approach to developing pupils' literacy skills;
- R4 provide good opportunities and support across the curriculum for pupils to improve their writing, including its technical accuracy; and
- R5 monitor and evaluate the impact of strategies for improving pupils' literacy skills.

Local authorities / regional consortia should:

- R6 clarify the roles of local authorities, consortia and the national support partners for training and supporting schools in the implementation of the LNF; and
- R7 improve the use of transition cluster meetings to establish a consistent approach to the teaching of literacy skills.

Welsh Government should:

- R7 make support materials for schools available in advance of further developments of the framework;
- R8 make sure that all schools can access support materials easily; and
- R9 provide schools with clear guidance on assessment and offer exemplification of expected literacy standards across all subjects.

Standards of literacy

Inspection outcomes

- 15 In most of the schools surveyed and inspected in the last two years, most pupils have good listening skills. They listen with attention and respect to their teachers and a majority do so to their peers. Most pupils respond clearly and confidently to questions. They express ideas and offer opinions, using general and subject-specific vocabulary. A minority of more able pupils articulate complex ideas and use an extensive vocabulary.
- 16 Many pupils read a range of texts and extract information effectively. However, a minority do not apply these strategies to extract information across the curriculum and consequently do not make the progress they should. Many more able pupils use higher-order reading skills, particularly synthesis and deduction in contexts such as discursive literary essays and the consideration of historical source materials. Many pupils who enter secondary school with weak reading skills often make good progress on intervention programmes.
- 17 In about three-quarters of the schools inspected in the last two years, and in those surveyed, most pupils write for a suitable range of purposes and audiences. A majority of pupils understand the purpose of their writing. They produce reasoned accounts and effective narrative pieces. However, they do not understand their audience well enough and do not always use suitable language and expression. A majority of pupils do not proof read or edit their work, and so their writing remains under-developed and basic errors persist. The standard of pupils' writing in many schools remains weaker than other aspects of their literacy, which is the same as at the time of the baseline survey.

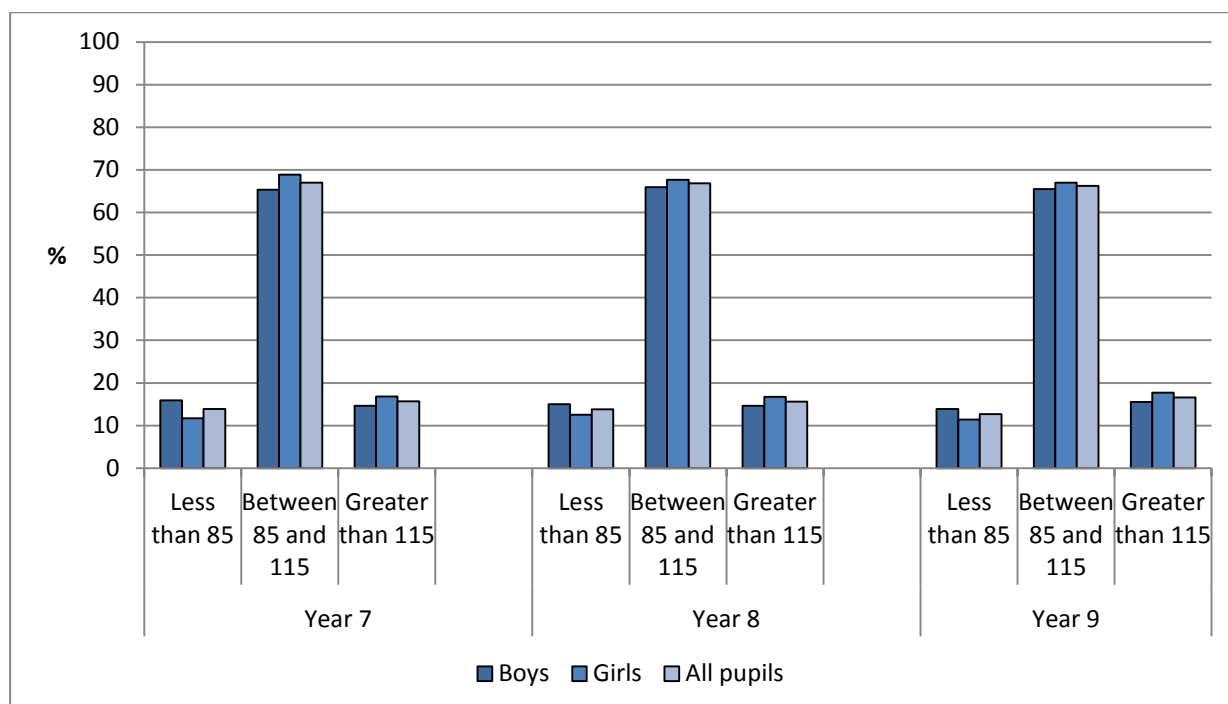
Teacher assessment

- 18 The percentage of key stage 3 pupils achieving the expected National Curriculum level 5 or above in English and in Welsh first language has risen in each of the last five years. However, despite this year-on-year improvement, the standards of pupils' literacy in lessons and in books, in the surveyed schools and during inspections, remains much the same as at the time of the baseline survey.
- 19 As in other key stages, girls perform better than boys at the expected (level 5+) and higher levels in English and in Welsh. At key stage 3, there is a difference of just over 10 percentage points in English and just under nine percentage points in Welsh first language. Since 2011, this gap has reduced by around a quarter in English and by around a third in Welsh first language.

National reading tests

- 20 Results from the second year of the National Reading Test (English) in May 2014 show that around 13% of key stage 3 pupils achieved a score below the level of functional literacy (less than 85). There were more boys than girls in this group. A majority of pupils scored within the expected range (between 85 and 115) and close to 16% performed higher than expected (greater than 115). There were more girls than boys in this group.

Percentage of pupils in Year groups 7, 8 and 9 achieving standardised scores within the band shown in the National Reading Test (English), by gender, 2014 (a)



(a) Does not include pupils who were disapplied or absent during the test window

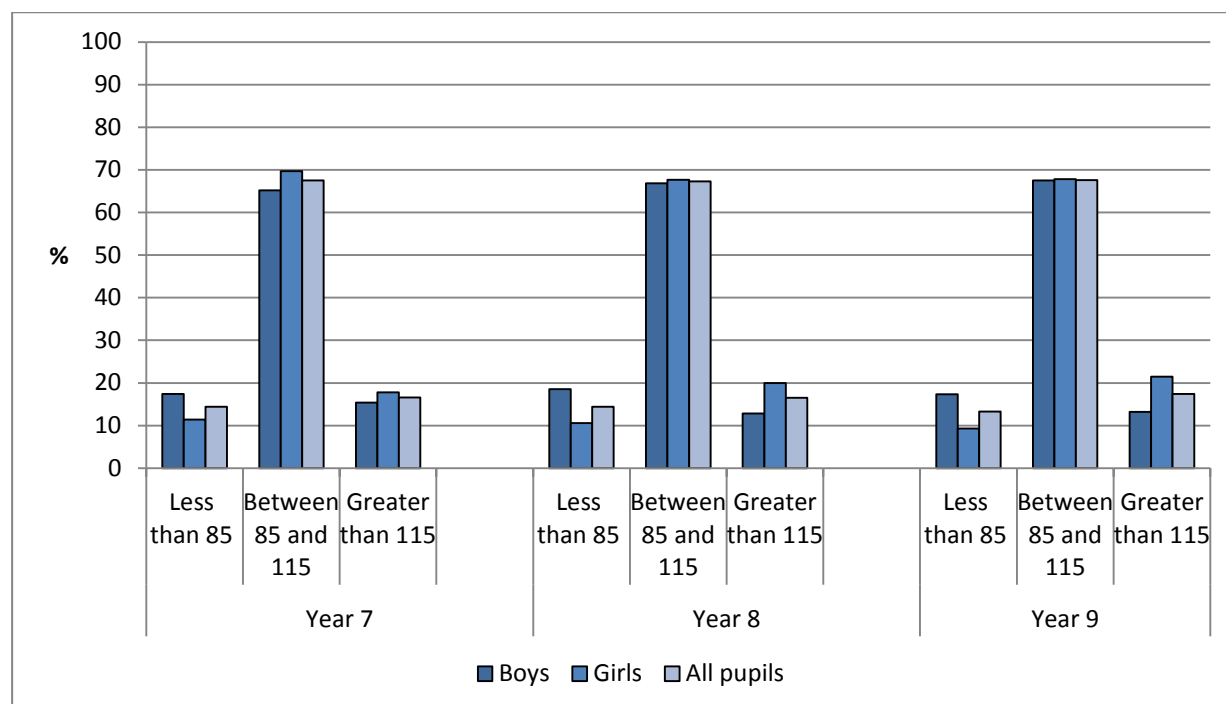
Source: National Data Collection (NDC), Welsh Government¹

Note: Results are standardised separately for the English and Welsh versions of the National Reading Test and should not be compared to assess the reading ability of pupils. Standardised scores provide a measure of relative performance only. The data should therefore not be used to compare relative performance across different cohorts and years.

- 21 In the National Reading Test (Welsh), the percentage of pupils achieving below, in line with and above expectation is similar to that in the English test. The pattern for boys and girls is also similar, although a higher percentage of boys achieved below functional literacy level (less than 85) and a higher percentage of girls performed above expectation (greater than 115). The gap between the performance of boys and girls achieving below functional literacy level and above expectation is greater in Welsh than in English.
- 22 In 2014, the proportion of Year 9 pupils achieving above expectation in the National Reading Tests (English and Welsh) is close to a third lower than the proportion achieving level 6 and above for reading in teacher assessment at the end of key stage 3.
- 23 A minority of schools use the National Reading Tests as a measure of pupils' literacy. They identify the areas where performance has been poor and amend their provision accordingly. They adapt schemes of work or provide additional sessions during form-tutor time. However, the majority of schools do not use the test data as a whole-school resource.

¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/national-reading-numeracy-test-results/?lang=en>

Percentage of pupils in Year groups 7, 8 and 9 achieving standardised scores within the band shown in the National Reading Test (Welsh), by gender, 2014 (a)



(a) Does not include pupils who were disapplied or absent during the test window

Source: National Data Collection (NDC), Welsh Government²

Note: Results are standardised separately for the English and Welsh versions of the National Reading Test and should not be compared to assess the reading ability of pupils. Standardised scores provide a measure of relative performance only. The data should therefore not be used to compare relative performance across different cohorts and years.

Standards of literacy in the surveyed schools

- 24 In the majority of schools visited as part of the survey, the overall standard of pupils' literacy was adequate. Although standards in English and Welsh first language at level 5 and above have continued to rise, the standards of pupils' literacy remain much as they were two years ago at the time of the baseline survey.
- 25 Lessons visited were usually in humanities. In nearly all lessons, pupils were taught in mixed-ability groups.
- 26 In a majority of lessons, nearly all pupils:
 - listen with care and attention to their teachers;
 - produce brief, often factual responses, to comprehension-type questions; and
 - read source material effectively to absorb information.

² <http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/national-reading-numeracy-test-results/?lang=en>

- 27 In the same lessons, a majority of pupils:
- listen to their peers with attention;
 - scan a text to pick out most of the main points of information; and
 - write well for a suitable range of purposes and audiences.
- 28 A few pupils:
- provide developed and sustained verbal responses;
 - make useful inferences and deductions from a range of texts provided;
 - demonstrate a clear awareness of authorial intent and bias; and
 - produce extended writing that is of good quality and has a high level of technical accuracy.
- 29 In a minority of lessons, a few pupils remain passive and teachers allow them to be so. When this occurs, pupils are too easily satisfied with brief verbal responses. A minority of pupils do not listen to their peers with attention or respect.
- 30 Inspectors scrutinised a sample of pupils' work in English or Welsh, science and humanities subjects. A majority of pupils use subject-specific vocabulary accurately and organise their writing appropriately in a range of subjects. They produce extended writing for a suitable range of purposes and audiences and demonstrate a good understanding of most of the writing text types. They have a clear sense of purpose in their writing, but their sense of audience and consequent language choices are frequently underdeveloped. Only a minority of pupils, usually in English or Welsh lessons, plan and redraft their writing effectively. In a minority of cases, pupils are not encouraged to write at length because of the restrictions of work-sheets. The use of work-sheets is common in humanities and science subjects and is a similar situation to that identified in the baseline survey.
- 31 In the surveyed schools, a minority of pupils, including the more able:
- plan and redraft their writing effectively;
 - produce well-crafted writing of different types;
 - demonstrate a strong sense of purpose and audience in their writing; and
 - use an extensive and often sophisticated vocabulary.
- 32 A majority of pupils do not edit or proof read their written work for spelling and grammatical errors, so that basic technical errors persist in around half of the books seen. A majority of pupils do not follow-up on the teachers' comments. The technical accuracy of pupils' writing is not improving quickly enough. This slow rate of improvement was highlighted in the Estyn report 'Best practice in the reading and writing of pupils aged 7-14 years' (2008) and in the baseline survey 'Literacy in key stage 3' (2012). More recently, it was identified in 'The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2012-2013' and in the report on 'English in key stage 2 and key stage 3' (June 2014).
- 33 A minority of pupils, including those with weaker literacy skills, often produce work that is untidy and incomplete and rely too much on support to structure their writing appropriately. They continue to make basic errors in their writing, including in spelling and punctuation, and use a limited vocabulary.

- 34 Many pupils use an appropriate range of reading skills including reading for information and comprehension. They skim to get an overview and scan to locate facts in several subject areas and media, including websites. Most pupils label diagrams accurately and present charts to draw conclusions and to explain concepts. However, a minority of pupils do not progress as well as they could, because of their limited reading skills.
- 35 A minority of pupils, including the most able, use higher-order reading skills well. This occurs most frequently in English and Welsh and in humanities subjects. The higher-order reading skills include:
- reading for response and analysis;
 - highlighting evidence and making inferences from text;
 - reading critically to respond to an opinion/argument;
 - synthesising from a range of sources;
 - comparing difficult texts;
 - providing alternative interpretations;
 - using inference and prediction;
 - demonstrating good planning skills; and
 - creating notes and mind-maps to show inference and draw conclusions.

Progression in literacy skills in the surveyed schools

Provision for literacy skills progression across the curriculum

Planning

- 36 In a few schools, the schemes of work show clear links to the LNF. In these schools, most teachers plan well to support the progressive development of pupils' literacy skills. Planned activities are often quality assured by the literacy co-ordinator to ensure a consistent and co-ordinated whole-school approach. Occasionally, this approach is supported by strategies such as cross-curricular, writing-progress sheets that pupils own and staff use across the curriculum. This allows pupils and staff to determine progress made and to set suitably challenging targets for developing the writing further.
- 37 Around half of the schools visited are at the early stages of developing a consistent approach to developing pupils' literacy skills. In around a quarter of these schools, staff identify appropriate opportunities to develop skills in their schemes of work, but do not yet exploit these opportunities in their lessons. In a further quarter of schools, staff plan appropriate opportunities for pupils to use literacy skills in their lessons, but these opportunities are often ad-hoc and do not form part of progressive schemes of work. In a few schools, there are clear references to skills in schemes of work and lesson plans but the level of skills is not generally in line with the year group expectations in the LNF. Overall, many schools are in the early stages of embedding opportunities to develop pupils' literacy skills, at the appropriate level, in schemes of work across all subjects.

- 38 In most schools, the opportunities identified for the development of pupils' literacy skills do not link well with the age and ability expectations of the LNF. A majority of schools do not have a clear understanding of progression in standards of pupils' literacy.
- 39 A majority of schools have completed their mapping exercise and identified where opportunities exist for the development of pupils' literacy skills. A minority have also identified where the gaps in the LNF coverage exist.
- 40 Staff in a few schools have decided to audit and quality assure schemes of work across the curriculum. This helps to ensure that different subjects use an effective and consistent approach. Where this occurs, it often provides a more robust model of planning to provide progression in pupils' skills.
- 41 In most schools visited, knowledge of the different writing text types, and approaches to extended writing taught within English and Welsh, are reinforced in many subjects. There is a significant level of consistency in this aspect in a minority of schools. In a few schools, speaking frames are used across the school to support pupils' oral responses in different subjects including humanities and physical education, as are reading and spelling strategies that have been agreed for use across the school.
- 42 Only in a minority of schools do staff work together to plan the progressive development of pupils' literacy skills. Learning support assistants are not usually included in such planning activities. A few schools have appointed and trained literacy assistants who are involved in planning learning opportunities for all pupils and are involved in delivering and in monitoring intervention programmes for pupils with weak literacy skills.
- 43 In a few schools, the English and Welsh departments support other subject departments in planning opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy. This support helps to ensure a consistent approach to developing pupils' literacy and that any misunderstandings concerning this are rectified. In the majority of schools, there are working groups focusing on literacy that help to raise the awareness of all staff. However, in a minority of cases, only inexperienced staff attend these groups to represent their departments, and they do not always understand how to share information effectively within their subject areas.

Teaching

- 44 In a majority of the lessons observed in the schools surveyed, teachers plan challenging activities that support the development of pupils' literacy skills. However, these are usually stand-alone tasks that are not part of any clear plan for progression or linked accurately to the LNF expectations. Examples of the tasks observed include pupils building on their reading skills and developing their inferential reading skills. This helps them to develop a deeper understanding of historical facts and opinions, for example, and to select, analyse and re-present information in extended oral responses. These tasks are often appropriate to the literacy levels of the pupils.
- 45 In most lessons observed, teachers' use of language helps pupils to develop their reading and writing skills. Teachers explore and clarify difficult vocabulary, provide pupils with strategies to help them understand unfamiliar words and model responses when editing examples of written work.

- 46 In around half of the lessons, teachers use pupil role-play and collaborative work effectively before writing. This helps pupils to think more widely about a topic and gives them an opportunity to rehearse their response orally before producing a piece of writing. Effective examples of role-play in the surveyed schools include news reporters looking at the range of events leading up to the execution of Guy Fawkes and doctors and patients looking at symptoms and possible treatments, to increase pupils' understanding of the bubonic plague.
- 47 In around half of the lessons observed, teachers ask searching questions to improve pupils' understanding. In a few lessons, questioning moves beyond determining recall and knowledge, to probe and challenge understanding. Often the questioning requires pupils to speculate as they determine their final, considered response. In a minority of lessons, teachers do not ask incisive questions and pupils do not get enough opportunity to develop their verbal reasoning skills.
- 48 In many lessons, teachers use paired and group reading to encourage pupils' participation in literacy activities. Examples of this include group discussions about scientific definitions used in source materials, about characters' emotions in a novel read in class and groups reading to locate information about religious festivals. In a few lessons, pupils do not make the progress they should because the teacher determines meanings, rather than drawing them from the pupils.
- 49 A minority of teachers provide opportunities for more able pupils to develop their higher-order reading skills. They encourage pupils to synthesise information from a range of materials, such as World War 1 source materials, and make predictions. Occasionally, pupils read critically, and infer and deduce.
- 50 A minority of the surveyed schools challenge more able pupils appropriately. In these schools, there is often a good balance between internal and external provision to support the development of more able pupils' literacy skills. In-house schemes of work identify clear opportunities for more able pupils to practise and develop their higher-order reading and writing skills and teachers provide precise, literacy-specific feedback. Most of these schools have good partnerships with higher education establishments. They use these links to improve the opportunities for more able pupils.
- 51 Schools support most pupils with weaker literacy skills through intervention programmes. Schools provide a good range of reading interventions, but significantly fewer support programmes for improving pupils' writing skills, as was reported in the 2008 Estyn report 'Best practice in the reading and writing of pupils aged 7-14 years' and in the baseline survey 'Literacy in key stage 3' published in June 2012.
- 52 The display in many classrooms supports the development of pupils' literacy skills by illustrating subject-specific vocabulary, common reading and spelling strategies, information on parts of speech, instructions on the correct use of paragraphs, and commonly confused words. Quite often, classroom displays include details of the school's literacy-marking protocol. However, a minority of teachers do not follow this protocol consistently in their written feedback to pupils.

- 53 Many of the surveyed schools have a useful range of strategies to support pupils as they develop their literacy skills. The range includes:
- the use of speaking frames;
 - literacy boxes and literacy walls in all teaching rooms;
 - common reading and spelling strategies;
 - a focus on extended writing;
 - spelling competitions between registration classes; and
 - differentiated literacy booklets used during registration periods.
- 54 However, most strategies have been in place for some time and very few have been introduced in response to the LNF. As a result, very few schools have considered how to adapt the use of the strategies to meet the year-on-year expectations of the LNF and the different needs of pupils.

Assessment

- 55 In nearly all the surveyed schools, the marking of pupils' work is up to date. In around half of the schools, teachers highlight literacy errors where appropriate. In only a few schools do teachers from all subjects advise pupils of errors other than simple spelling and punctuation, or start to comment on sentence construction, use of adjectives and connectives, or style and expression.
- 56 In a very few schools, pupils receive clear feedback on how to improve their writing as well as the subject content of their work. In these schools, teachers often give pupils time to reflect on comments, complete corrections and clarify any uncertainties through discussion with the teacher. In around half of the surveyed schools, teachers' comments tell pupils what they need to do to improve their written work. Where this happens, most pupils respond and make suitable progress. In a minority of schools, teachers do not give pupils clear enough guidance on how to improve their literacy skills. Too often, follow-up work by pupils consists of simply copying out misspelt words.
- 57 In around half of the schools visited, pupils do not take enough responsibility for correcting and improving the technical accuracy of their writing. As a result, basic errors persist. Only a minority of pupils redraft their work effectively. This is usually in English or Welsh lessons. Individual help sheets provide a good level of support for the minority of pupils who need it. However, in a few lessons, teachers use common templates for extended writing too widely, including with pupils who do not need them. Often, this is due to non-specialist teachers' lack of understanding of the writing process. This practice limits the development of pupils' independent writing skills.
- 58 In most of the surveyed schools, the use of peer assessment does not generally help to improve pupils' literacy standards. This is often because pupils do not know how to comment meaningfully on understanding and interpretation of texts. Too often, their comments focus only on basic aspects of spelling or punctuation. Only a minority of pupils value this approach because their understanding of success-criteria is not strong enough to be able to apply them successfully.

Leadership and management in surveyed schools

Leading and co-ordinating whole school approaches to literacy

- 59 Nearly all schools visited have a literacy co-ordinator with either an English or Welsh teaching background. Over half of them are new to the position. In most cases, this is due to a high turnover of staff, although in a few instances it is because schools are appointing staff with more appropriate skills. In a few schools, the literacy co-ordinator has other significant responsibilities, which make it difficult for them to dedicate enough time to the role.
- 60 All of the schools visited have a literacy policy that staff understand. Around three-quarters of schools have updated their policies to meet the requirements of the LNF. Many schools think carefully about how best to support the development of pupils' literacy through allocating funds and in-service training (INSET). This includes:
- allocating a separate budget for literacy;
 - investing in the library;
 - providing tutor-time literacy booklets;
 - appointing literacy learning support assistants;
 - training learning support assistants to deliver intervention programmes; and
 - delivering an on-going staff development programme focused on improving literacy skills across the school.
- 61 However, in a few schools, the strategy to deliver the literacy policy is not comprehensive enough and is missing one or more of the above elements.
- 62 In over 90% of schools, developing pupils' literacy skills is a priority in their improvement plans. This is a higher proportion than in the baseline survey, when it was a priority in only around 65% of schools. A few schools have useful discrete literacy and LNF development plans. In a minority of schools, the planning for improvement is beginning to raise standards. These schools have a coherent and consistent approach and literacy is a priority in all subjects. In the majority of schools, strategies to improve pupils' literacy skills across all subjects are not explicit enough. In most plans, success criteria are vague and actions often relate to the implementation of the LNF, rather than to pupil outcomes. This is often due to a misunderstanding of the aspects of the LNF that each subject should be delivering. Most schools have clear, measurable end-of-key-stage 3 and GCSE targets in English and in Welsh, but only a very few schools have targets linked explicitly to the LNF end-of-year expectations.
- 63 Most schools use general work scrutiny and lesson observations, which are often also part of the performance management of staff, to monitor literacy. In most schools, these methods are often compliance models that identify the regularity and quality of provision and they do not focus well enough on pupils' standards. A very few schools have a whole-school literacy target for performance management. This target helps to emphasise the importance of employing a cross-curricular approach to developing pupils' literacy skills and results in a more robust monitoring of that development.

- 64 Nearly all schools evaluate the impact of their approaches to literacy by looking at one or more of the following:
- the progress of pupils who are part of an intervention programme;
 - national and in-house reading tests;
 - pupils' progress against targets for key stage 3 English or Welsh levels; and
 - GCSE English or Welsh results.
- 65 Many schools rely on various test scores to comment on pupils' literacy, but do not take enough account of what they see in pupils' books and in lessons.
- 66 In most schools, the English or Welsh departments lead the development to improve pupils' literacy skills. In a few schools, these departments provide designated 'literacy link' teachers who support specific subjects. The links provide resource and exemplar materials and guide the initial teaching of skills to pupils. In a very few schools the English or Welsh departments provide beneficial, personalised training for teachers of other subjects following their own identification of strengths and weaknesses. This is particularly helpful and creates greater consistency in the school's approach.
- 67 Links between subjects are important in developing a consistent, progressive approach to improving pupils' literacy. In a few schools, these links are well developed. In Elfed High School, Buckley, all subjects use writing planning sheets that link explicitly to strands of the LNF. In Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymini, the English, Welsh and modern foreign language departments work together on triple-literacy projects to improve pupils' literacy skills.
- 68 Just over half of the surveyed secondary schools have good transition arrangements with feeder primary schools. These schools use cluster arrangements to share detailed, specific information on pupils' reading and writing skills. This results in smoother, more effective transition. The schools work together to produce cross-phase projects, usually based around humanities subjects, with transition units mapped against the LNF. In these schools, cross-phase moderation sessions generally result in more accurate standardisation. In a minority of schools, cross-phase partner work on sharing information and the standardisation of pupils' work is underdeveloped and schools do not use data effectively to support pupils' progression.

The response of schools to the Literacy and Numeracy Framework

- 69 Nearly all schools and consortia see the value and importance of the LNF. They appreciate that the LNF:
- is statutory;
 - provides a structured continuum for the development of pupils' literacy skills;
 - gives a clear focus to the development of literacy;
 - highlights the need for literacy skills to be developed across the curriculum; and
 - encourages a consistent approach within and across schools.

70 Most of the surveyed and inspected schools have found the implementation of the LNF and the timescale for the implementation challenging. The limited availability and accessibility of resource materials and the variable quality of support provided have contributed to this challenge. The main challenges associated with the timeline for implementation are:

- the limited support available until after the introduction of the LNF;
- the lack of clarity on how to up-skill staff;
- the emphasis placed on how to track and monitor the development of pupils' literacy skills which has diverted attention away from improving the quality of provision necessary to raise the standard of pupils' skills; and
- the lack of clarity on how to report to parents in a meaningful way.

71 In addition, most schools are challenged by the requirement to map the progression of pupils' literacy skills and by the formal assessment of those skills, with pupils having strengths and areas for development in different strands of the framework.

Training and support initiatives

72 Strategies used by schools to support the development of teachers' skills to help them to teach literacy more effectively include:

- training on the development and use of literacy toolkits;
- training in the use of speaking frames and thinking skills;
- new spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPAG) codes to use when marking for literacy;
- literacy working groups;
- training in reading comprehension;
- training in using writing frames;
- an audit of staff skills; and
- in a few schools, a staff analysis of strengths and weaknesses and subsequent support from English or Welsh departments.

73 Most of the Welsh Government and National Support Programme (NSP) resource materials are useful, especially when used selectively. This includes the guidance and systems for self-evaluation, which are comprehensive and detailed. However, a majority of schools have not accessed all of these materials because the Learning Wales website is difficult to navigate and because many of them have been late in being delivered.

74 Many of the schools surveyed were visited in the early stages of phase 2 of the National Support Programme. This phase of the programme involved reviewing the school's progress in implementing the LNF and agreeing the school's literacy and numeracy improvement priorities. The quality, consistency and impact of this support to schools have been too variable. Often, this is related to the quality and experience of the individual partners. Recent developments have been helpful in improving the support, including:

- the appointment of NSP senior partners to quality assure work and to ensure that messages are consistent across schools and authorities; and
- the attendance and contribution of NSP partners at consortia training courses.

- 75 In the schools where the support has been good, the NSP partner has helped to improve the provision for developing pupils' literacy skills. In these schools, the NSP partner has worked closely with senior leadership teams and feeder primary schools and often provided additional planning meetings. Other help has included identifying the most useful sections of the LNF guidance and highlighting good practice in other schools. A few schools use the NSP videos on their websites to inform teachers and parents.
- 76 In schools where NSP support has been less successful, NSP reports often lack objectivity and are based too much on the school's opinion rather than on evidence from pupils' work. The systems to share information between the NSP, local authority officers and challenge advisers are not developed well enough. This results in schools having to repeat tasks and administration activities to meet different bureaucratic requirements.
- 77 The baseline study 'Literacy at key stage 3' (Estyn 2012), recommended that local authorities should produce 'a well-developed literacy strategy and mechanisms to improve standards across the curriculum'. This has not happened and the responsibility for doing so has become unclear since the introduction of consortia and the implementation of the NSP. In a majority of the surveyed schools, there has been little meaningful impact from the consortia or practical support from challenge advisers. As a result, schools have been slow in understanding and implementing what is required by the LNF.

Evidence base

The evidence base for this report includes:

- National Reading Test and key stage 3 English and Welsh first language data;
- visits to 21 secondary schools;
- interviews with key staff and pupils to capture their views;
- scrutiny of pupils' work including during lessons;
- lesson observations;
- an on-line survey sent to a further 40 secondary schools;
- discussions with consortia literacy specialists; and
- a review of inspection evidence from September 2012 until July 2014.

The schools visited as part of this remit were:

- Abersychan Comprehensive School, Torfaen
- Alun School, Flintshire
- Corpus Christi Catholic High School, Cardiff
- Cwrt Sart Community Comprehensive School, Neath Port Talbot
- Cyfartha High School, Merthyr Tydfil
- Cymer Afan Comprehensive School, Neath Port Talbot
- Denbigh High School, Denbighshire
- Elfed High School, Flintshire
- Newtown High School, Powys
- Pontypridd High School, Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Rhymney Comprehensive School, Caerphilly
- St David's High School, Flintshire
- Tonypandy Community College, Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Tredegar Comprehensive School, Blaenau Gwent
- Ysgol Bro Morgannwg, Vale of Glamorgan
- Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni, Caerphilly
- Ysgol Gyfun Rhydwaun, Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf, Cardiff
- Ysgol Gyfun Y Preseli, Pembrokeshire
- Ysgol John Bright, Conwy
- Ysgol Uwchradd Aberteifi, Ceredigion

Appendix 1

Case study 1

Context

Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni is a large Welsh-medium secondary school in Caerphilly. There are 1,439 pupils on roll, of whom 5% of pupils speak Welsh at home. Around 13% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is below the national average of 17.5%. Nearly 8% of pupils live within the 20% most deprived areas of Wales. It is estimated that around a third of adults living in the area need help with basic literacy and numeracy.

Strategy

The development of dual literacy is a means of ensuring high levels of performance in Welsh and English and in other subjects across the curriculum. The main aim is to develop a coherent approach to developing writing skills, including drafting and technical accuracy, and to provide appropriately challenging reading tasks. The strategy is led by the Welsh and English departments in response to the introduction of the LNF.

Action

Guidance and provision

The school's core-literacy team refined schemes of work to map existing writing tasks and then planned opportunities for more extended writing, following different text types, and introduced richer reading opportunities. They identified and removed less challenging tasks from schemes of work. Suitably challenging dual literacy tasks are now evident across the curriculum. In one example, Year 9 pupils read detailed scientific information about the structure of an atom in English and are then required to answer a series of questions in the form of 'two truths and a misconception' in Welsh. This ensures that they re-visit the scientific information several times, deepening their understanding of what can prove to be a difficult topic. This technique has proved effective when teaching a chemistry unit, based on the periodic table and the elements, and is easily adapted to suit pupils of all abilities. In geography, pupils read about the effects of climate change in different countries from several challenging sources (a different country for each group), both on paper and on screen, in English and in Welsh. They report to each other in Welsh before selecting an appropriate form for an extended writing task.

Curriculum leaders from humanities and science lead staff training sessions to share practical examples of literacy-rich tasks from their subject areas. These examples are shared with other schools in Wales and England. In addition, language policies were revised in light of the LNF and a user-friendly version of the LNF produced. This is used by staff and pupils and by partner primary schools. There is an extensive peer observation programme and teachers from Cwm Rhymni teach literacy to Year 6 pupils once a week. Furthermore, more able pupils from the feeder schools visit Cwm Rhymni for triple/quadruple literacy (French, Italian, English and Welsh) extension tasks that develop thinking skills well.

Evaluation

Termly literacy progress meetings, chaired by Welsh and English teachers, together with a traffic-light system, inform assessment. The school considers National Reading Test outcomes, and English and Welsh National Curriculum levels, on an individual pupil basis. Effective methodology, including for the more able pupils, is then identified and shared.

Outcomes

The subject links, important in planning for progression, are well developed. Teachers from the respective Welsh and English departments provide practical advice that is based on successful outcomes. There is a far greater understanding of, and consistency in approaches to, the important issue of extended writing and to the writing process. This is already leading to higher standards of work as evidenced through lesson observations and work scrutiny.

Case study 2: Using the expertise of primary school Welsh specialists to support Year 7 pupils with weak literacy skills

Context

Ysgol Bro Morgannwg is an 11-18 Welsh medium comprehensive school in the Vale of Glamorgan. There are 806 pupils on roll and around 7% are eligible for free school meals. This figure is significantly lower than the national average of 17.5%.

Strategy

Many pupils arrive in Year 7 with reading ages well below their chronological age, with a limited working vocabulary and making persistent errors in syntax, punctuation and spelling. It was felt that many staff considered themselves to be subject teachers only, without the responsibility for any language input. In 2011, the school decided to use the SEG grant to employ three former primary school teachers, with expertise in Welsh, to work in the school one day a week, with a target group of 49 Year 7 pupils.

Action

Oracy

The teachers used language-drilling techniques with an emphasis upon grammatical accuracy and accuracy of expression. In Welsh lessons, pupils were given specific tasks such as 'Llwyfan Llafar' ('Speaking Platform') where they had to make a presentation to the class, using more refined language. The school filmed the presentations in order to raise awareness of the excessive use of English and of English idioms.

Reading

The use of small groups improved pupils' confidence and their skills in reading aloud developed quite quickly. The school recognised the strong link with parents, which often diminishes when pupils enter high school, as a further supportive strategy. One

of the teachers appointed created subject-specific reading tests that follow the pattern of the national reading tests. This supports pupils' reading skills, extends their subject knowledge and understanding, and prepares them for the annual test.

Writing

The need for more detailed scaffolds and carefully differentiated materials was clear. The school rewrote many schemes of work with an emphasis on language indicators such as vocabulary, form and fluency, and introduced a range of more prescriptive tasks.

In 2014, the Year 7 curriculum included the creation of a basic skills group with one teacher delivering Welsh and humanities.

Outcomes

In 2013, pupils' performance in Welsh first language, and in English, rose by around seven percentage points from the previous year, and moved the school into the top half of similar schools. Over 90% of the 49 pupils targeted, gained a level 5 or higher in both Welsh and in English. Pupils' ability to use their skills in different situations and subjects is clear in better outcomes in key stage 3. Teachers across the curriculum have greater confidence and competence in their extended roles as teachers of language.

Case study 3: Cross-curricular development of pupils' writing skills

Context

Elfed High School is an 11-18 comprehensive school in Buckley, Flintshire. There are 590 pupils on roll with around 16% eligible for free school meals. This is slightly below the national average of 17.5%.

Strategy

In 2011, the school recognised the need for a coherent approach to literacy that was genuinely cross-curricular and writing was identified as a major impediment to overall attainment. The standard of boys' writing was significantly weaker than that of girls. At this time, the only strategy being used to support the development of pupils' literacy skills was the school's literacy marking policy. Literacy was a priority in the school's improvement planning and staff developed a shared understanding of the content and organisation of a range of different writing types. With the introduction of the LNF in 2013, the whole-school literacy focus shifted towards improving the technical accuracy of pupils' writing and also progressively, to developing their writing skills.

Action

By July 2013, all subjects had created carefully differentiated subject-specific writing frames for a range of extended writing tasks. These were then quality assured by the literacy co-ordinator. The resources generated were shared digitally within the school

and a portfolio of strong examples was created. In addition, all subjects reviewed their teaching and learning strategies with pupils and modelled good practice with them. As a result, pupils were more able to identify key aspects of content and organisation of writing and to transfer them to their own work.

In September 2013, the literacy co-ordinator and head of English delivered whole-school training looking at the writing elements of the LNF including a cross-curricular assessment of pupils' work against the skills identified in the 'Writing Accurately' aspect of the framework. This enabled staff to engage effectively with the language of the LNF and with the technical skills that need to be reinforced if writing is to improve. It also allowed them to reflect upon their own skills and understanding of spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Following the training, all staff completed a 'SWOT' analysis of their diverse personal literacy training needs. This resulted in successful, individualised support of subjects and individuals by the English department. The literacy working group was disbanded and replaced by members of the English department becoming literacy links for all other subjects, ensuring that the messages regarding the implementation of the LNF were consistent and understood fully.

The English department led a pilot restructuring of their lessons to focus clearly upon spelling, punctuation and grammar. The 'writing progress sheet' used to support the planning and reflection on writing skills rolled-out successfully across the curriculum in January 2014. The sheet shows the logical progression in writing skills that pupils need to deploy to improve. This also develops pupils' understanding of the language of the LNF, which supports more consistently meaningful and productive pupil self-assessment of technical accuracy.

Evaluation

Lesson observations, talking to pupils and work scrutiny demonstrate that pupils are far more able to transfer the skills they have been taught in English and set themselves challenging writing targets.

Outcomes

In 2014, pupils' performance in English at level 5 and above rose by nearly three percentage points to 89% compared to 87% in 2013. The improvement in writing was six percentage points at level 5 and above. The performance of boys improved and the gender difference fell by 13 percentage points. Now there is very little difference between the performance of boys and girls. In 2014, overall performance in English improved by 15 percentage points at level 6 and five percentage points at level 7.

Glossary/references

Functional literacy	A pupil at the chronological age of 11 would need a reading age above nine and a half years of age to be considered functionally literate.
Higher-order reading skills	The specific reading skills of location, reorganisation, inference, evaluation and appreciation of texts. 'Guidance on the teaching of higher-order reading skills' (Welsh Government 2010) provides training activities for teachers focusing on the use of these across the curriculum.
SPAG	Spelling, punctuation and grammar
Success-criteria	The standards by which an activity or skill will be judged to be successful
SWOT analysis	A planning method used to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
Thought stems	Getting pupils to think about and consider their work before they do it
Writing text types	Different types of writing. There are six main non-fiction text types: recount, instruction, non-chronological reports, explanation, persuasion and discussion. 'Guidance on the teaching of writing skills' (Welsh Government 2010) provides training activities for teachers focusing on the use of these across the curriculum.

The remit author and survey team

Tony Sparks HMI	Remit author
Jackie Gapper HMI	Team inspector
Jane McCarthy AI	Team inspector
Catrin Mathias AI	Team inspector