



Literacy Guide for Secondary Schools 2012-2013

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Introduction

Literacy skills are essential for young people to reach their potential in school and fulfilling opportunities throughout life. Every school needs a rigorous whole-school literacy policy which is implemented systematically across the curriculum and all teachers should view themselves as teachers of literacy, regardless of their subject specialism. Some schools have achieved this and as a result young people are able to not only access the curriculum, but have the tools to extend their thinking and knowledge with outstanding results.

However, the challenges persist. Around 16 per cent, or 5.2 million adults in England, can be described as "functionally illiterate". This year Ofsted reported that "although GCSE English results have improved for the last three years, nearly 30% of pupils who are entered for GCSE English do not achieve grades A* to C." (Moving English Forward, 2012). According to a National Literacy Trust survey, young people's reading frequency is also in decline.

Alongside this, the policy landscape is changing significantly. The new draft curriculum for English for primary schools (2012) includes a strong emphasis on the teaching of spelling, grammar and punctuation (SPG), a focus that may well be prominent when the secondary curriculum is reviewed. During inspections, Ofsted will place a stronger emphasis on effective whole-school literacy policies and their successful and systematic implementation across the school. Finally, the new Teachers' Standards (2012) require for all teachers to "demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English."

The *Literacy Guide for Secondary Schools 2012-2013* has been written with the aim of supporting you to interpret the current education drivers in the context of your own school. It offers you the opportunity to consider how literacy is embedded within your own teaching, as well as your school's approach to supporting literacy. For each of the six sections that this guide covers, we suggest key advice and ideas and illustrate how these relate to the research and also the policy requirements in this specific area.

The National Literacy Trust provides a wealth of support for schools in each of the six areas. For further information about our offer to schools, download a copy of our Support for Schools publication at www.literacytrust.org.uk/schools.

Developing teachers' reading approaches

Integral in developing pupils' wider reading and reading for enjoyment is how teachers facilitate reading for meaning through using a range of teaching methods and approaches.

1. What does the research say?

UKLA (2010), *The Teaching of Reading* (p. 5):

A *balanced approach* is needed in which attention to word recognition skills is matched by attention to comprehension. This means that understanding and effective communication are just as important as word recognition.

Graves and Fitzgerald (2003), *Scaffolded Reading Experience (SRE)*:

- "It is extremely important that children understand what they read, enjoy the experience of reading, learn from what they read and realise that they have learned from and understood what they read" (p. 96).
- The SRE framework provides a wide variety of activities which are used in pre, during and post reading stages to enhance pupils' enjoyment and reading for meaning (p. 101-102).

Kispaal (2008), *Effective Teaching of Inference Skills for Reading, NFER report*:

"The ability to draw inferences predetermines reading skills; that is, poor inferencing causes poor comprehension and not vice versa" (p. 6). The report states that inferencing can be practised outside the domain of reading with pupils of all ages and that one way of cultivating these skills in young readers and reluctant readers is to do it in discussion, orally. It suggests using 'reciprocal teaching' and 'think-aloud'.

Ofsted (2012 March), *Moving English Forward*:

- "Too few schools currently develop reading skills effectively across the curriculum.... In subjects other than English... teachers are less aware of approaches that might help pupils to read effectively and make sense of what they are reading".
- "Guided reading... The important question for schools is not whether they make use of a guided reading approach but how effective it is".
- "Pupils themselves frequently commented to inspectors that they would like more opportunities to respond in a creative way to the books they read" (p. 30).

2. What does Government policy say?

Department for Education (2012), *Teachers' Standards*:

Promote high standards of literacy...whatever the teacher's specialist subject.

Ofsted (2012 April), *The framework for school inspection*:

Ofsted inspectors will judge how well pupils develop/teaching enables a range of skills, including reading... and how well they apply these across the curriculum.

Ofsted (2012 March), *Moving English Forward*:

"All teachers should have a better understanding of the role literacy plays in their subject... and...[this will] enable them to understand how improved reading, writing and speaking and listening skills would help them make more progress in their own subject" (p. 54).

3. What can you do to improve pupils' skills in this area?

Suggestions for lead teachers / literacy co-ordinators

- **Advise teachers in all subject areas about comprehension strategies**, that is, the sets of steps that good readers use to make sense of a text. For instance, developing the “direct teaching of reading skills such as skimming, scanning and reading for detail (including on the internet); using the index and glossary; identifying key points and making notes; summarising; or using more than one source” (Ofsted, 2012, *Moving English Forward*, p. 30). This must be planned within the scope of reading for enjoyment and tasks should engage pupils with the world beyond the classroom.
- **Provide guidance on how to organise and sequence learning in pre, mid and post reading activities**. These strategies will help pupils become purposeful, active readers (see below).

Pre-reading activities

- **Teachers should clarify pupils' purpose for reading**. They should relate the reading to pupils' lives; pre-teach concepts that might inhibit understanding; and activate or build background knowledge needed to make sense of the text.
- **Teachers must also develop pupils' toolbox of comprehension strategies** such as making connections, asking questions and forecasting predictions. It could also involve previewing the text or questions related to the text so that it focuses reading.
- **Teachers should pre-teach vocabulary through games**, along with drama, to explore and bring new language alive. In primary school, pupils use reading and writing journals as a wonderful place to store words and phrases.

During-reading activities

- **Teachers should vary the way the text is read**. This could involve silent reading, bringing a text alive by reading to pupils, oral reading by pupils, audio recordings or guided reading. Teachers should do everything to avoid reading becoming a dull and slow business – and this isn't achieved by just reading extracts, but on teacher approaches that are imaginative, innovative and lively. Sharing reading aloud or reading around the class must be dealt with cautiously as pupils waiting their turn may cause tension.
- **To help pupils read for meaning, use reciprocal teaching and thinking aloud** (Graves and Graves, 2003, p.43), asking questions, and modification of the text. Directed activities related to texts (DARTs) are a form of text modification. For more information, see 'General advice for developing teachers' reading approaches' below.

Post reading activities

- **Suggestions include further questioning, discussion, building connections, writing, drama, artistic, graphic and nonverbal activities, application and outreach activities and re-teaching**. Ofsted are quite clear about using these multi-sensory, creative and innovative approaches, rather than *overusing* exam preparation techniques.

Pupils should be encouraged to see the reading strategies they do have, rather than do not have, so they see themselves as good readers.

General advice for developing teachers' active reading approaches

- **The use of DARTs.** There are four main types of DARTs – cloze, text reconstruction, text marking and text sequencing - and they all help pupils make sense of a text, and can be used as pre, during or post-reading activities. For example, text reconstruction uses graphic organisers (also known as visual diagrams) to help readers make sense of a text. The type used will depend on the purpose of the text or what needs to be drawn out. For example, a venn diagram would enable pupils to compare and contrast, a story board or timeline would help pupils sequence events or steps. These response activities develop pupils' reading strategies, that is, their ability to skim, scan and/or read closely, for key words and synonyms, to answer questions, and to comprehend. It also increases pupils' appetite for reading for enjoyment and improves comprehension skills, when underpinned by collaborative talk.
- **Teachers must foster thinking and talking about texts by creating an environment of rich dialogue and response towards all types of text.** The reading of images and film, fiction, poetry and non-fiction is vital in developing talk and response, the starting point for comprehension. Excellent resources used in primary schools to support quality talk are *'Tell me'* and *'The Reading Environment'* both by Aiden Chambers. Also, read the case studies from Ofsted's *'Excellence in English'* report for a flavour of the power of different approaches (see section on "Developing powerful communicators" for more activities).
- **Drama supports reading for meaning.** There are a variety of strategies such as tableaux, promenade, staging, hot seating, echoing and games such as "Stand up if..." to enhance response and comprehension.
- **Questioning by both teachers and pupils is foundational in improving comprehension.** It should involve the explicit exploration and development of literal, inferential and evaluative questioning. Revisit your approach to guided reading to ensure it is effective in developing enthusiasm, response and key skills. Guided reading groups use cooperative learning and should complement other strategies.