Improving literacy in secondary schools: a shared responsibility

Soon after his appointment in January 2012, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills, Sir Michael Wilshaw, gave a speech in which he declared: 'Improving standards of literacy must be a priority for all our schools.'

He made a commitment to help in improving national standards in literacy by introducing a greater focus on literacy in school inspections and by publishing a detailed survey of what works best in secondary schools to improve literacy across the curriculum.

This survey drew on visits to seven secondary schools identified in earlier inspections as effective in delivering cross-curricular improvement in literacy. The visits were carried out in schools across England between June and October 2012.

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Introduction

There is nothing new about the focus on whole-school literacy. As a headteacher commented in *The Times Educational Supplement*:

> If you want a sure way to provoke a collective groan in your staffroom, announce that you are intending to hold a training day devoted to whole-school literacy. 'We did that five years ago!' someone will shout.[1]

The staffroom response presented in this snippet has the snappiness of caricature but it crystallises attitudes that may explain, in part, why so many literacy initiatives over the years have failed to have a long-lasting impact on daily practice in secondary schools. It reveals a diminished view of what 'literacy' encompasses.

At its most specific and practical, the term applies to a set of skills that have long been accepted as fundamental to education. The Department for Education is clear and emphatic – the curriculum should offer opportunities for pupils to:

- 'engage in specific activities that develop speaking and listening skills as well as activities that integrate speaking and listening with reading and writing'
- 'develop speaking and listening skills through work that makes cross-curricular links with other subjects'
- 'develop reading skills through work that makes cross-curricular links with other subjects'
- 'develop writing skills through work that makes cross-curricular links with other subjects'
- 'work in sustained and practical ways, with writers where possible, to learn about the art, craft and discipline of writing'
- 'redraft their own work in the light of feedback. This could include self-evaluation using success criteria, recording and reviewing performances, target-setting and formal and informal use of peer assessment. Redrafting should be purposeful, moving beyond proofreading for errors to the reshaping of whole texts or parts of texts.'[2]

It is common for any one of the strands – speaking and listening, reading and writing – to be used as if it were synonymous with the wider concept of 'literacy'. When those in the wider world – employers, for example, or representatives of national or local government – complain about falling standards of literacy, they most often have in mind spelling, punctuation and grammar. The blame is then directed towards

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[1] Geoff Barton, Headteacher, King Edward VI School, Bury St Edmunds, in *The Times Educational Supplement*, 5 March 2010.
[2] 'English: curriculum opportunities', Secondary National Curriculum until 2014, Department for Education; updated 26 April 2012; www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/secondary/b00199101/english/ks4/programme/opportunities.

schools, although examples are legion of businesses that subvert standard spellings and syntax in their trade names and slogans, and of official publications and signage that disregard standard rules of punctuation. The message for those still at school or college is that the rules and conventions they are being taught have little to do with 'real life'. This was one of the more discouraging findings of the long English report in 2009: 'Pupils who were less enthusiastic about the subject and made poorer progress said that it had little to do with their lives or interests outside school.'[3]

'Literacy', however, is more than the mechanics of reading, writing, speaking and listening. The National Curriculum demands that connections be made between each strand and across subjects, which calls for thought and understanding, for recall, selection and analysis of ideas and information, and for coherent, considered and convincing communication in speech and in writing. All pupils should be encouraged to:

- 'make extended, independent contributions that develop ideas in depth'

- 'make purposeful presentations that allow them to speak with authority on significant subjects'

- 'engage with texts that challenge preconceptions and develop understanding beyond the personal and immediate'

- 'experiment with language and explore different ways of discovering and shaping their own meanings'

- 'use writing as a means of reflecting on and exploring a range of views and perspectives on the world.'[4]

This survey looks at how some secondary schools have identified and are successfully tackling weaknesses in pupils' literacy – not only in their speaking and listening, reading and writing, but in their readiness to engage with challenging concepts, to make constructive connections between subjects and to learn from the thinking and experience of others. This wider view of literacy features in the teaching and learning policies and the practices of the schools visited, where:

- long-term planning for literacy, rather than a focus on 'quick fixes', is understood to be important

- headteachers and senior leaders give active, consistent and sustained support

- the need is recognised to make the case for literacy in all subjects and answer the question for teachers, 'What's in it for us?'

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[3] *English at the crossroads* (080247), Ofsted, June 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080247.
[4] 'English: curriculum opportunities', Secondary National Curriculum until 2014, Department for Education, updated, 26 April 2012;
www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/secondary/b00199101/english/ks4/programme/opportunities.

- effective use is made of specialist knowledge to support individual departments and teachers

- teachers are encouraged to identify effective practice in different areas of the curriculum and to learn from each other

- there is an emphasis on practical ideas that teachers can use in longer term plans and schemes of work

- effective use is made of the library and librarian

- senior leaders keep a close eye on developments through systematic monitoring and evaluation.

Leaders and managers at all levels in these schools appreciated that there was no one way to get it right and that departments were likely to identify different literacy priorities and approaches as being particularly useful in their subject area.

Making the case for literacy

The case for promoting literacy across the secondary curriculum is urgent and essential. Too many pupils still emerge from our schools without the confident and secure literacy skills they need to thrive as adults. In January 2012, the National Literacy Trust updated its *State of the nation* review of literacy.[5] It found that one in every six adults struggles with literacy, with a literacy level below that expected of an 11-year-old. Levels of achievement are often associated with pupils' levels of deprivation. In 2009, a survey by the Department of Children, Schools and Families showed that only 33% of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals (FSM) achieved C or higher in English, compared to 62% of non-FSM pupils. It found a 32% gap between those pupils in areas of greatest deprivation who achieved Level 5 at the end of Key Stage 3 and those in areas of least deprivation.[6] Another survey commissioned by the government in 2009 reported that professionals working with school leavers not in education, training or employment (NEETs) agreed that these young people often had experiences of school that were not positive. While for some this may have been because they disliked school, for others it was related to their inability to engage with education due to poor basic literacy skills or learning difficulties.[7]

A survey of 566 employers, undertaken by the Confederation of British Industry in 2011, highlighted the dissatisfaction felt by more than four in every 10 of these employers about the low standards of basic literacy demonstrated by many school

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[5] *Literacy: state of the nation,* National Literacy Trust, January 2012; www.literacytrust.org.uk/research/nlt_research/2364_literacy_state_of_the_nation.

[6] *Deprivation and education – the evidence on pupils in England: Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4* (DCSF-RTP-09-01)*,* Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009; www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DCSF-RTP-09-01.

[7] *Increasing participation: understanding young people who do not participate in education or training at 16 and 17* (DCSF-RR072), Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009; www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/Youthandadolescence/Page7/DCSF-RR072.

and college leavers.[8] The All Party Parliamentary Group on Education recently reported that literacy is a huge issue for the nation, our society and our economy, not just for schools.

The importance of literacy has been recognised by governments across Europe and beyond. A recent European Union report spoke of a 'literacy crisis that affects every country in Europe':

> If smart growth is about knowledge and innovation, investment in literacy skills is a prerequisite for achieving such growth… Our world is dominated by the written word, both online and in print. This means we can only contribute and participate actively if we can read and write sufficiently well. But, each year, hundreds of thousands of children start their secondary school two years behind in reading; some leave even further behind their peers... Literacy is about people's ability to function in society as private individuals, active citizens, employees or parents... Literacy is about people's self-esteem, their interaction with others, their health and employability. Ultimately, literacy is about whether a society is fit for the future.[9]

Ofsted's reports present a mixed picture, not one that is entirely or even predominantly bleak. In *Removing barriers to literacy*, for example, inspectors identified good practice that others could replicate.[10]

> The most successful schools emphasised that there was no 'eureka' moment, that is to say, specific or unusual practice. Rather, they made what one school described as 'painstaking adjustments' to what they did when their monitoring provided evidence of weaknesses and they stuck with what worked.

Inspectors also found:

> In the secondary schools where teachers in all subject departments had received training in teaching literacy and where staff had included an objective for literacy in all the lessons, senior managers noted an improvement in outcomes across all subjects, as well as in English. The high-performing colleges visited adopted similar strategies to improve outcomes.

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[8] *Building for growth*, Confederation for British Industry, 2011; www.cbi.org.uk/media-centre/news-articles/2011/05/building-for-growth.
[9] *Final report of the EU High Level Group of experts on literacy*, 2012; ec.europa.eu/education/literacy/resources/final-report/index_en.htm.
[10] *Removing barriers to literacy* (090237), Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090237.

The most recent schedule for the inspection of maintained schools and academies in England has emphasised the importance of literacy. The descriptors for an outstanding school now include the following criteria.

- Excellent practice ensures that all pupils have high levels of literacy appropriate to their age.

- Pupils read widely and often across all subjects.

- Pupils develop and apply a wide range of skills to great effect, in reading, writing and communication.

- The teaching of reading, writing and communication is highly effective and cohesively planned and implemented across the curriculum.

- Excellent policies ensure that pupils have high levels of literacy, or pupils are making excellent progress in literacy.

Aspects of literacy are now built into each of the key judgements made in a school inspection: overall effectiveness; achievement; the quality of teaching; and leadership and management. An outstanding school is likely to have outstanding policies and practice in promoting literacy across the curriculum. All groups of pupils must be seen to make good or better progress, including those for whom English is an additional language, those with special educational needs and those known to be eligible for government funding through the pupil premium.

The evidence gathered during this survey shows that teachers in a secondary school need to understand that literacy is a key issue regardless of the subject taught. It is an important element of their effectiveness as a subject teacher. National teaching standards, which set the benchmark for the evaluation of teaching by school leaders and by Ofsted, require teachers to 'demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English, whatever their specialist subject.' [11] It is the responsibility of school leaders to check that teachers have that understanding, to establish training programmes when needed, and to monitor rigorously how effectively teachers are developing pupils' literacy skills as an integral element of their wider learning.

Effective teaching of language, its meaning and use in a geography lesson, for example, helps pupils to learn geography more successfully. Similarly, pupils are unlikely to make good progress in physical education (PE) if they are unable to speak clearly about tactics or strategies in sport. Survey evidence also indicates a link between more engaging approaches to developing pupils' literacy skills and a marked fall in rates of persistent absence from previously hard-to-reach pupils or those at risk of dropping out of education.

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[11] *Teachers' standards* (DFE-00066-2011), Department for Education, 2012; www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/SchoolsSO/Page1/DFE-00066-2011.

Evidence from survey visits to schools suggests that teachers are easily convinced about the primary importance of literacy in all subjects if the case is carefully and successfully explained. For example, one school in the survey promoted literacy to all teachers using the following arguments.

> 'What's in it for departments?
>
> ■ Literacy supports learning. Pupils need vocabulary, expression and organisational control to cope with the cognitive demands of all subjects.
>
> ■ Writing helps us to sustain and order thought.
>
> ■ Better literacy leads to improved self-esteem, motivation and behaviour. It allows pupils to learn independently. It is empowering.
>
> ■ Better literacy raises pupils' attainment in all subjects.' [12]

Nevertheless, the case for literacy does need to be made more effectively if teachers are not to argue, 'We did that five years ago… and it made no difference.' Schools should directly address the question: 'What's in it for me?' This report's findings should help to answer that question and promote cross-curricular literacy in schools.

In the following case studies, the seven schools explain how they went about improving literacy. The report then comments on the key principles of practice that unite these very different schools.

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[12] Springfield School, Portsmouth.

Literacy in secondary schools: The case studies

Angmering School, West Sussex: SALAD Days – an approach to speaking and listening across the curriculum

Introduction

It is not unusual to find secondary schools that are attempting to develop literacy. However, it is less common to find schools that are focusing systematically on speaking and listening across the curriculum. This became Angmering School's priority after some successful work on whole-school reading. Teachers realised that pupils were not as confident or articulate as they needed to be and that this was hindering progress across the curriculum. The school began to plan whole-school activity days focused on speaking and listening, known as SALAD days (**s**peaking **a**nd **l**istening **a**ctive **d**evelopment days). These were welcomed by staff and pupils and raised the profile of speaking and listening and its role in learning. The next step was for the school to develop speaking and listening within all lessons and across schemes of work.

The school's 'literacy across the curriculum' strategy was developed by the subject leader for English and initially focused on reading for enjoyment. Pupils now talk enthusiastically about reading and about the range of measures to support reading. These include:

- a very effective school library and librarian – the librarian promotes reading competitions, clubs, reading awards and a range of other initiatives including half-termly visits from writers

- a daily DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) session in tutor time, which involves all pupils from Years 7 to 11 reading (with their teachers) in silence for 20 minutes each day

- a system of paired reading, where Year 10 pupils act as 'personal trainers' in supporting weaker readers in Year 7 on a one-to-one basis.

However, the subject leader for English soon realised that the reading initiative needed to be supplemented by whole-school work on speaking and listening. Teachers found that weaknesses in oral communication and expression were holding pupils back in a range of subjects. Opportunities for oral assessment within courses such as English and geography increased teachers' recognition of the importance of speaking and listening. Teachers recognised that, as one commented, 'How to teach pupils to write well is first to get them to speak well.' Many pupils lacked confidence in speaking and were reluctant to join in with whole-class discussion. The English staff saw that weaknesses in self-confidence and articulacy often disadvantaged their pupils when they took part in debating competitions with pupils from other schools.

As a result, recent developments have concentrated on speaking and listening. The headteacher commented:

> SALAD days aim to deliver a portable set of key skills and a common language, with explicit teaching of these skills in each subject area. As this is a school with an above-average number of disabled pupils including some with visual and hearing impairments, and pupils with special educational needs, clarity of communication for all is at the heart of the school's ethos. Giving pupils the confidence to articulate their views in a range of contexts will, we believe, help them become more effective, life-long learners.

SALAD days each term

In order to involve all departments in the speaking and listening initiative, the literacy coordinator introduced SALAD days as termly events. On these days, teachers do not ask pupils to write within lessons; all lessons are structured around speaking and listening activities. Some departments have found this more straightforward than others but inspection evidence is that pupils very much enjoy the days. The literacy coordinator described how they have evolved:

> The aim was for talk to be promoted in all lessons by all subject teachers and for it to be the main focus for the day's learning. The first day focused on group discussion; the second on debating; the third on presenting; and the fourth on role play. I discussed with subject leaders the key skills that we thought pupils would need, including setting some ground rules and emphasising the need for teachers to model talk. We wanted pupils to know how to structure their talk, so that they would gain confidence when speaking in different situations, and this needed to be planned.

> I provided some prompt cards to help pupils tackle different types of talks, and a range of lesson plans for different subjects. All teachers and subject leaders said they were impressed by the level of discussion and thinking that these activities generated, and many said that they would want to include these types of task in their normal schemes of work.

Planned activities included the following.

■ English: Year 7 pupils learnt poems by heart and Year 9 pupils gave presentations about famous speeches, evaluating the techniques used.

■ Business Studies: Year 10 pupils gave presentations about chosen entrepreneurs and used 'voting pods' to evaluate each other's work.

■ Drama: Year 9 pupils performed scenes from their own play and Year 10 pupils were involved in pop star interviews and role play.

■ History: pupils discussed war and the effects of war, making use of maps, songs, images and word banks to develop discussion.

- Mathematics: pupils carried out research on specially chosen mathematical topics and delivered presentations to the rest of the class.
- Food technology: Year 11 pupils watched a film about vegetarianism and factory farming, going on to discuss the issues raised and the effectiveness of images used in the film.

The first SALAD event was regarded as successful by all members of staff and the days have now become a regular part of the termly programme. The natural development from these sessions has been to ensure that similar speaking and listening activities are promoted more regularly within normal classroom work. As a result, the speaking and listening element is now one of the four key elements in the current school improvement plan. The development strands within speaking and listening are as follows: the further development of SALAD days, with an emphasis on group presentation and role play; developing debating skills both inside and outside lessons; and enhancing teaching and learning within all lessons, including the dissemination of good practice from different departments.

Speaking and listening across the curriculum

The SALAD initiative generated interest from all departments in developing higher quality oral work in routine lessons. For example, the science department has eagerly adopted this approach to speaking and listening. The school has appointed a lead teacher for literacy in science and she has become involved in cluster work within the local authority. The science department emphasises exploration and investigation in pupils' learning; speaking and listening are necessary skills within this context. Teachers use starter activities such as 'talking graphs', where pupils in pairs use graphs on the interactive whiteboard to discuss and explore scientific concepts and processes. Pupils are involved regularly in group research leading to presentations on scientific topics, including moral and social aspects of science. Group discussion, debates and *Question Time* role plays are regularly employed in science lessons. As an extension of this work, the department has also brought in a theatre company to work with pupils on scientific topics, involving pupils in performance, discussion and debate. Other activities in current science lessons include:

- groups preparing arguments for class debates on the use of alternative fuels
- *Just a Minute*, challenging pupils to talk non-stop for one minute on the topic of natural selection without repetition, hesitation or deviation
- pair discussions on, for example, why some women might have difficulty in becoming pregnant, involving research into the use of fertility drugs, followed by presentations to the whole class.

This approach extends into homework. For example, one homework task is called 'Scientists at work: a science independent enquiry'. Pupils choose a job done by a scientist and find out as much as they can about the aspect of science involved and the equipment used. Pupils are expected to write about the moral and ethical implications of the scientist's work and how the work might affect other people's

lives. Pupils then share their findings with the rest of the class through oral presentation. It is clear that speaking and listening are at the centre of pupils' investigative learning in science and that teachers think carefully about how to structure and promote group work, the development of ideas through class discussion, and the speaking and listening skills involved in formal presentations.

The school operates a thematic *Futures* programme across subjects within the Key Stage 3 curriculum. It is designed to develop generic learning skills that are applied particularly to real life, work-related contexts. For example, Year 7 pupils work in teams to organise a charity event and run a themed café. In Year 8, the projects include debates, running a health campaign, and producing a game show based on career topics. At the heart of this approach is the recognition that pupils need to learn the skills required to work together, listen to others, make decisions, solve problems and explain clearly what they have done. In Year 8, pupils are challenged to make the case for 'The Greatest Briton', carrying out research and presenting their arguments to the rest of the class. A typical lesson in Year 7, observed by inspectors, revolved around the question, 'What makes a good team worker?' Pupils noted down their own ideas and then worked in teams, agreeing on the most important ideas and feeding these back to the rest of the class. Other pupils then evaluated the effectiveness of different presentations.

Practical speaking and listening activities can be seen across different subjects. In PE, for example, pupils take photographs of peers involved in gymnastics. The photographs are then used for discussion, in which pupils evaluate the effectiveness of the work that they are doing. In another lesson, a teacher issues pupils with a number of role cards for the lesson. Roles include an equipment manager, a warm-up leader, a drill instructor and a referee. Pupils take leading roles within the lesson and later evaluate the impact of their work and the effectiveness of the language used.

History teachers make particularly strong use of a range of speaking and listening activities. The emphasis in the department is on getting pupils to justify their own interpretation clearly and concisely. 'Hot seating', in which a pupil or teacher takes on the persona of a fictional or historical character and answers questions from the class, role play and drama are regularly used and pupils are encouraged to develop and evaluate skills such as use of 'body language, eye contact and appropriate vocabulary. One topic in Year 7, 'Blood on the Cathedral Floor', focuses on the killing of Thomas Becket, which pupils turn into a show with presentations, arguments and discussion.

The school's emphasis on speaking and listening fits very well with the mathematics department's activity-based approach to learning through investigations and real-life situations. Pupils are expected to describe their findings clearly and justify their answers through debating, competitions and other activities, all with a strong emphasis on use of the correct technical language. Teachers use photographs to prompt questions about mathematical shapes and concepts. These are followed by

group discussions based around 'What would happen if...' Year 9 pupils are asked to teach a topic to other pupils, and their presentations revolve around topics such as 'What does a barcode mean?'

What is the impact of all this work?

It is often difficult to gauge improvements in something as complex as speaking and listening. Teachers comment that pupils appear to be more confident and self-assured than previously. This is reflected in their improving performance in inter-schools debating competitions. A speaking and listening moderator for the speaking and listening element of GCSE English commented:

> Pupils were obviously used to speaking and listening activities and enjoyed the session. Pupils were fully engaged. The school has a radio centre and the students use this to make broadcasts. The school also has a thriving debating club and enters public speaking competitions. Speaking and listening are prominent parts of its strategy for literacy across the curriculum. As a result pupils performed very well in the oral assessment.

There has been an upward trend, sustained over three years, in pupils' average points scores across all subjects and in the percentage gaining A* to C grades in English, humanities and science. The proportion making expected progress in English across Key Stages 3 and 4 is well above average.

Chenderit School, Northamptonshire: Developing a whole-school literacy community

Introduction

Chenderit School in Banbury has established a national reputation for literacy. It won the *Times Educational Supplement* award for Outstanding Literacy in 2011 and frequently provides training for other schools. Its approach focuses on the use of pupils and the wider community to promote and lead on literacy. This reflects the school's vision of creating a culture where all pupils are capable of exercising responsibility, working independently and leading on an area of the curriculum. The headteacher believes that the impact of the approach can be seen in ever-improving standards in English – pupils' average points scores for English have been significantly above average for three years – and also in higher standards generally across the curriculum; for example, the proportion gaining A* or A grades in core science was well above average in 2012. He comments:

> Our approach to raising standards in literacy is informed by these key ideas: if we wish to produce a dramatic improvement in pupils' performance we need to change their attitudes to what they do, and the way they see themselves; and the way pupils use their knowledge about language is the product of a wide range of influences, including their teachers, friends and parents. Our aim has been to create a wide range of opportunities for pupils to become active agents in their learning, to be, in the familiar phrase, crew, not passengers.

Inspired by research evidence that shows profound learning gains when pupils explain to others, and by a commitment to pupil leadership as the core of outstanding behaviour, we are working to engage every part of the school community. Because leadership is at the heart of our work, pupils work alongside us to innovate and articulate. In starting out we chose not to conduct detailed audits and write long policies; we started with activity and engagement, and the policies arose out of reflection on what we had done. Every evaluation is a plan for the next stage.

The aim is to create a 'literacy village'. In other words, all parts of the school community are affected by, and contribute towards, the promotion of strong literacy. This includes parents, local primary schools and the wider community. Visitors to the school are greeted by posters in all public places, emphasising the school's literacy focus, with the heading 'Enjoy and achieve', supported underneath by references to the school's 'Three Ls' of leadership, learning and literacy. The past two three-year development plans were both focused around these Three Ls. As a result, all members of the Chenderit community have realised that 'literacy is here to stay', with pupils actively promoting and developing approaches to reading, writing, speaking and listening.

The day at Chenderit School begins with a Staff Information Meeting (SIM). This is not the normal exchange of administrative detail. On the day of the inspector's visit, two Year 10 pupils presented a series of slides about reading and the importance of reading to a full staff meeting. The pupils had developed the materials, in their role as 'literacy leaders', to deliver in lessons. They spoke confidently about reading, asked the staff questions and responded to their queries. Following the SIM, around 30 sixth form students (all studying A level English), together with several parents and teachers, worked with selected Year 8 pupils during tutorial time in the library. It is not uncommon in many schools for sixth form students to be used to support pupils' reading; here, however, the intention is a little different.

The sixth formers are all trained 'Functional Skills Tutors' and have been guided in their role by the headteacher. They provide six-week blocks of intensive support each term for selected Year 8 pupils. The emphasis is on pupils' writing. The Year 8 pupils are not the weakest writers in the year group; instead they are pupils who would not otherwise have received individual support with their work in English. During the session observed, the first in the new term, the sixth formers and Year 8 pupils worked together in groups to plan and construct a story for primary-age pupils. The sixth formers asked younger pupils what kind of story they would like to write, took their suggestions, shared ideas and vocabulary, and began to plot the story together. The six-week block will conclude with a set of completed stories written by the Year 8 pupils. In the next term, the sixth formers and Year 8 pupils will continue to work together on a script for a short video about life in the school, to be presented to the upcoming Year 7 pupils. In the third term, the pupils will work together to produce videos about Year 8 pupils' experiences in the school so far,

their hopes and fears, and their thoughts about the future. These short videos will then be available to new Year 7 pupils and to all staff through the SIMs.

The headteacher believes strongly that all pupils in the school can, and should, be leaders in some aspect of school learning. He wants them to take responsibility for their own learning, and thereby to contribute to the school community and help others. The leadership roles currently available for pupils include Plenary Leader and Numeracy Leader, as well as Literacy Leader.

The Literacy Leader programme is certificated and recognises pupils' achievement at three different levels. For the bronze award, pupils assist teachers in the classroom through identifying and making use of literacy resources in the school's 'Lit Box'. For the silver award, pupils create their own resources to be used in classrooms and saved to the Lit Box. For the gold award, pupils teach aspects of literacy to their own or other classes, across subjects, using resources they have created for the Lit Box. For example, in one Year 10 information and communication technology (ICT) lesson observed by an inspector, where pupils were working on producing a leaflet, two pupil Literacy Leaders contributed to the teaching. One revised aspects of punctuation while the second talked about the different features of a typical leaflet, explaining some of the differences between, for example, a leaflet and a letter. This was typical of the ways in which pupils routinely act in a supportive teaching role, as agreed and negotiated with their teachers. Senior leaders take on a key role in quality assuring the resources produced by pupils.

The Lit Box is an online literacy resource available to support all teachers across all departments. Many of the resources are produced in such a way that they can be customised by other pupils. For example, some pupils produced a series of literacy questions about punctuation based on the TV show *Who wants to be a millionaire?*
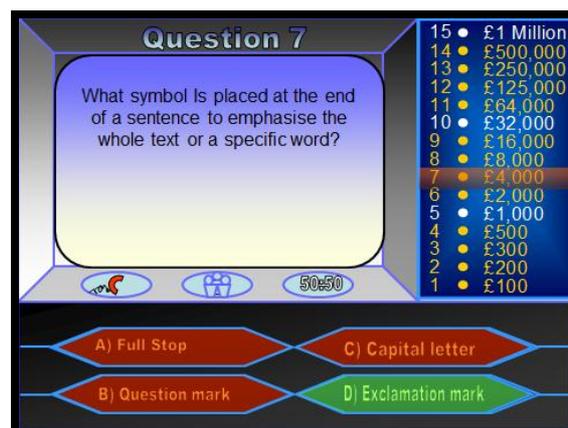
Their template can be amended by other pupils for their own purposes, for example to provide a series of questions about Shakespeare's plays. The idea of Literacy Leaders is now firmly embedded in the school's culture to the point where every class has at least one Literacy Leader. It has become common practice for teachers across all departments to discuss with the Literacy Leaders in their class how they might support learning in lessons.

The literacy steering group is a second example of the school's practice of putting pupils in positions of responsibility for learning and encouraging them to lead. This group has so far been involved in two important areas of literacy development. First, it was asked to review the school's marking policy. The view from the group was that it was over-complicated and did not provide pupils with the feedback and guidance they required. As a result, the policy was simplified and focused more explicitly on the impact of teachers' comments. Second, pupils were involved in delivering training to other teachers and pupils on cross-curricular literacy. This initially started as a contribution to courses organised through external agencies. On the way back from one conference, a pupil asked, 'Why don't we do our own?' Subsequently, the school provided a number of such conferences. These are organised and at least partly delivered by the pupils themselves. The pupils involved speak enthusiastically about this experience and the extent to which it has improved their confidence and self-assurance.

Debates: giving pupils a voice

It is not surprising that the emphasis on pupils taking responsibility for their own learning has contributed to positive development in their speaking and listening experiences and skills. It has been supported by a substantial emphasis within the school on pupil debates of varying types. These now involve pupils from Year 8 to the sixth form. The numbers involved are significant; well over 60 sixth formers contributed to debates last year and more than 20 teachers have been involved in one way or another. The pupils themselves run a weekly debating club, providing training and advice for other pupils. Pupils take part in a wide range of competitions across different styles: formal debates, *Question Time* events, round table discussions and public speaking competitions involving local schools.

The tradition is so firmly established in this school that MPs, lecturers and others are often invited into the school to talk to pupils. Pupils frequently visit other schools to talk to them about how to set up their own clubs and debates. Emphasis on formal debate has been carried into a number of lessons. Pupils talk about frequent discussions of this kind in history, French and English, and teachers point to improved progress in a number of subjects at A level as one result of this approach.

Community involvement

The school involves parents as Foundation Skills Tutors in supporting the Year 8 writing programme referred to earlier. These parents receive training and are encouraged to produce their own resources and to vary the sessions as appropriate. The school also provides support and advice for all parents on how to help their children with literacy. Parents are able to access the school's Litweb, which provides them with advice and support in literacy.

Links with Chenderit's main partner primary schools are exceptionally well developed. Annual projects have included: *Travellers' Tales,* involving the British Museum, the Terracotta Army, paintings, and story-writing; *Excel to Tell*, an oral story-telling

festival; and *Life in a Suitcase*, a community cohesion project. These engage all pupils in the primary schools, not just Year 6, as well as some secondary pupils. The aims of this initiative are clear and typically include a focus on improving literacy, particularly pupils' ability to write at length, and on ways of engaging boys. As a result, when new pupils arrive in Year 7, the school already feels very familiar to them.

Current initiatives

The school has recently produced a set of lesson descriptors for literacy, along the lines of the Ofsted evaluation schedule. These set benchmarks for literacy in lessons across subjects and are used in lesson observations and learning walks. They evaluate:

- whether pupils listen and speak thoughtfully and courteously, and whether they are given thinking time when asked questions
- the quality of presentation
- use of a wide range of punctuation, writing in paragraphs and high-quality spelling.

The school also makes use of 'collapsed' timetable days to promote literacy and independent learning. On one recent day, pupils worked in groups to create literacy materials that might be marketed for use in other schools. The aim was to produce resources that would engage all pupils. The senior leadership team acted as publishers, listening to the presentations and giving appropriate feedback. The materials produced then became available to be used in the school's Lit Box.

The City Academy, Hackney: Integrating literacy from the start

Introduction

The City Academy opened in September 2009 with Year 7 pupils. The principal was determined to ensure that literacy was integrated into the fabric of the school from the first day. As it was new, the school was in an excellent position to plan consistently for literacy, with all teachers and all pupils, from its very beginning. This showed in its early transition work with primary schools, in the early appointment of a teacher to lead on both English and literacy, and in its clear whole-school policy for literacy. The key, according to the principal, is that systems, including those for literacy, must be simple, straightforward and consistently applied.

Starting with literacy

The school has established a literacy policy with five strands that guide the work of all teachers.

- Pupils in lessons should always speak in sentences.
- There should be a consistent policy on marking and feedback (a 'green pen' approach).

- Pupils should always have a 'book on every table'.
- Teachers in all subjects should model writing for their pupils.
- Pupils should be taught to organise their extended writing into well-structured paragraphs.

The survey visit confirmed the consistency with which teachers from different departments implement the literacy policy. In mathematics and science lessons observed by inspectors, there was considerable emphasis on pupils explaining their answers in detail. Teachers modelled the appropriate language, for example:

> In full sentences, please. 'In the first place, we should get rid of fractions and then…'

> Can you explain that in a full sentence? 'I know that magnesium is more reactive than copper because…'

Marking in all subjects has a literacy focus, as do success criteria and learning objectives. For example, in a very effective history lesson observed by inspectors, there was an explicit expectation that pupils would answer using full sentences. There was an equally explicit and shared expectation that pupils' writing would be carefully structured, using paragraphs, capital letters and full stops. There was a sharp focus on pupils' literacy skills, quality of writing, technical proficiency and pace of working. Pupils were clear about how well they were doing against National Curriculum levels of attainment in English and about how to improve their writing. When assessing their own writing and that of their peers, pupils used the level descriptors accurately and made comments, using green pens. All pupils are expected to have a green pen with them at all times so that they can make a full contribution to peer and self-assessment.

Reading is a key element in the school's approach. There is an expectation that pupils will read individually each day for 20 minutes. This is monitored by the librarians through discussion and the students' book logs. Reading is not confined to English lessons. Partly as a result of a timetable that provides one-hour and, in some cases, two-hour lessons, many subject teachers are keen that pupils should do some reading in their lessons. As a result, individual reading is now a common feature in lessons, including ICT and art.

Literacy in the library

The importance of literacy in the school is signalled very clearly through its library provision. There are three full-time librarians. When it was pointed out by the senior librarian that the school library space was not adequate for the expanding pupil population, senior leaders agreed to create a second library on a different floor. These developments do not reflect a higher level of school budget than in other schools; rather, they reflect a particular and focused use of resources in an area of identified need, namely, reading and the other literacy strands.

In addition, the librarian is given a significant middle management role. The library is fundamental to the teaching of reading and study skills. As well as the librarian, two full-time, graduate assistant librarians work with pupils and ensure that the library runs smoothly. The library is well stocked and effectively managed and is open from 7.30 each morning. Pupils make good use of this to carry out independent research, complete homework, catch up with local and national news or read the range of sports magazines.

All Year 7 pupils have a weekly timetabled lesson in the library, where reading and independent research skills are taught explicitly. In these lessons, pupils' reading habits are carefully tracked and discussed. Their progress in developing good reading habits and their reading and comprehension skills are carefully assessed and recorded. Pupils' progress in reading is monitored closely and discussed with the head of English or the librarian. Those who are not making enough progress in reading are required to undertake extra studies through additional enrichment sessions held at the end of the normal school day.

As a result of this sharp focus on pupils' literacy skills, expectations for all teachers in both reading and writing are high.

Kirk Hallam Community, Technology and Sports College, Derbyshire: Becoming a reading school

Introduction

The importance of reading for enjoyment has a high profile at the college. The college's librarian, working closely with English and other subject teachers, is a driving force in this agenda. The headteacher commented:

> At the college, we believe that improving pupils' literacy skills is vital if we are to raise their aspirations and achievements. Encouraging pupils to read for pleasure is just one of the strands of literacy that the college has used to promote developments in this area. When the college became a specialist technology college in 1998, we invested some of the specialist school funding in the library as we believed that this would support all learners in a range of subject areas. The library is a busy, exciting place to be in. It is a resource that subject teachers can and do want to use. It makes use of traditional books and electronic media to captivate pupils' interests. Whole-school initiatives such as the development of a 15-minute core reading time every day and book boxes have been used successfully to establish good reading habits. The Literacy Special Interest Group, chaired by the Literacy Coordinator, is being used to identify and share the very best practice in reading throughout the college.

Reading and the library: 'Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body'

The college's librarian has a passion for reading and for encouraging young people and adults to read. The library has a vibrant atmosphere, with wall displays and

promotional posters such as 'Turn the pages of your imagination – READ'. The librarian coordinates a wide range of enrichment activities. World Book Day is celebrated for a week. This year, all the activities were linked to the theme of 'The book that changed my life'. There was a reading breakfast where pupils and staff dressed up as their favourite characters. Competitions such as designing a bookmark were held, with book tokens as prizes, and each day pupils were challenged to guess the name of a book by the clue that was given to them during tutor time.

Pupils of different ages and abilities take part in the activities on offer in the library. One Year 10 pupil described the impact of taking part in shadowing the Carnegie book award: 'I really like science fiction and fantasy novels and those books have always been my first choice. Now, after reading different types of books as part of the Carnegie group, I have started to enjoy books in the mystery genre.' The librarian ran a Jubilee Reading Group in the summer term of 2012. Derbyshire City Council had chosen *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White[13] as its Jubilee reading book and the school's librarian decided to do the same. As well as reading the novel, which was published in 1952, the group also read and discussed non-fiction texts from the same era.

Across the year, the library runs themed sessions on national events; these involve different subject areas and are given a literary flavour. They include Holocaust Memorial Day, National Poetry Day, National Storytelling Week, and Roald Dahl Day. The Storytelling Week involves pupils and staff in making up and telling each other stories.

Reading to achieve

This project was set up between the librarian and the college's head of physical education. It was cross-curricular and linked with Derby County Football Club. Its aim was to encourage more young people to read, and it used football as a hook. A grant of £500 from the college's Sports College status fund enabled the librarian to buy books with a football theme. The scheme ran three times over a six-week period,

[13] Publication details are given at the end of the report.

each time with a group of pupils meeting twice a week during 'core reading' time. There were three cohorts, each with 12 pupils from Year 7. Boys and girls of different levels of ability were selected, based on recommendations from form tutors and the librarian, and on assessment evidence. A convincing love of football was also a factor in the selection.

During the sessions, pupils could choose from the selection of books bought with the grant and also from other reading-based activities maintaining the football connection. These included: football-related websites; sports pages of local and national newspapers; football magazines; poetry read aloud by pupils; and group reading of plays. Records of pupils' achievements were made in their reading passports. At the end of the project, pupils were rewarded with a free ticket for a Derby County FC home match, certificates from the football club and a 'behind the scenes' tour of the football ground.

The librarian has tracked the borrowing records of pupils involved in the project and can see that most of them have increased the number and variety of books they have taken out of the library. One Year 7 pupil explained, 'I really enjoyed it when we read a play about football together.' The pupils' reading records show that they have continued to choose a wider range of books as a result of the project. The greater engagement and sense of purpose being established in previously hard-to-reach pupils or those at risk of exclusion is reflected in the college's marked reduction in persistent absence.

Reading and English lessons

As part of the English curriculum, each Year 7 and Year 8 class has one lesson per week in the library. Lessons cover a variety of topics such as graphic novels, different genres, non-fiction, author profiles, project work and whole-class reading, as well as quiet reading sessions. The school makes it clear that an important aspect of these lessons is 'to teach pupils how to choose books that will be suitable for their interests and abilities in a friendly, non-judgemental way'. Links are made between the weekly library lessons and the texts pupils are studying in other English lessons. A vice principal who teaches English describes how she uses some of the library time. 'I was teaching *Private Peaceful* by Michael Morpurgo to my Year 7 group and we used the library lessons to explore non-fiction texts related to World War One.[14] Pupils used the library research skills they had developed earlier in the year to find and access texts and resources.'

The head of English shares the librarian's passion for reading and believes that reading widely, often and well contributes to pupils' achievement and personal development. He is a strong advocate of a scheme which promotes reading for pleasure. A reading log (a 'passport') encourages pupils at all levels to read a range of texts, to reflect on them and to share their responses in a variety of ways, and so improve their wider literacy skills.

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[14] Publication details are given at the end of the report.

Core reading

Each day all pupils have a 'core reading' session after lunch. This gives them an opportunity to read daily for pleasure, to talk about reading, to develop reading strategies and to be offered individual support if they need it. The literacy coordinator has prepared activities that tutors can use to develop a balance across the week of quiet and active reading time. Activities include reading short articles about topics that pupils find interesting. She suggests offering crosswords based on the articles provided, to ensure that the pupils have understood key information. Pupils are encouraged to scan and skim articles, often for a second time; this has worked well and become a valuable reading technique that pupils use successfully.

The librarian makes available different types of text for tutors and pupils. A visual stimulus she has created, which she also uses when teaching English, is a book tree.

> I use the book tree to help pupils to discover other texts that they might be interested in. For example, one tree has *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins as the trunk and the branches are novels that inspired the writer or that explore similar themes. The books at the top of the tree are the most challenging and this encourages pupils to 'climb' the book tree as high as they can.

The books linked to *The Hunger Games* are:

Divergent by Veronica Roth
The Maze Runner by James Dasher
The Bar Code Tattoo by Suzanne Weyn
The Knife of Never Letting Go by Patrick Ness
Germinal by Emile Zola
The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Attwood
Lord of the Flies by William Golding
The Giver by Lois Lowry[15]

Reading in subjects across the curriculum

As well as promoting reading for pleasure, college leaders expect teachers of subjects across the curriculum to support pupils in developing their reading skills and reading widely. Drama lessons encourage pupils to read widely and fluently. In Year 10 mixed-ability drama classes, for example, pupils are given additional help, when needed, to read, understand and remember a script. By speaking the lines and working out how to add emphasis, pupils are able to spot important linguistic clues that help them make sense of the text. French lessons create opportunities for pupils to develop and apply reading strategies. For example, they use skimming and scanning strategies, consider the context of a sentence and are encouraged to think

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[15] Details of the books mentioned are given in the notes at the end of this report.

of more familiar words that have a similar derivation and meaning when trying to interpret new words or phrases. As part of the Year 7 geography curriculum, a scheme of work is being developed using the novel *The White Darkness* by Geraldine McCaughrean as a stimulus to study Antarctica, other extreme environments, land formation, and weather and climate. Other subjects, including design and technology and PE, also support the development of reading strategies and pupils' writing and communication skills through research-based projects and presentations.

Reading and the wider community

Approaches have been introduced that seek to extend reading for pleasure into the whole school community. First, all pupils in Year 8 work on a 'Story Stack' project as part of English and library lessons. This involves pupils choosing picture books and creating activities based on these to be used when they visit a local primary school to work with children in Year 1.

The headteacher of Ladywood Primary School describes why it is so successful:

> Our children love stories but the joy of having a 13-year-old boy read 'Rumble in the Jungle' to a captive audience of five-year-old boys is a sight to behold. The pupils from Kirk Hallam take the project very seriously and obviously think about the choice of story, how they can bring the story to life and what games they might be able to play with the children – including dressing up as a penguin if necessary!

Good links with the local library have brought a number of benefits, including several of the college's pupils being selected as reading mentors for young readers during the summer break, as part of the library's holiday reading scheme. Kirk Hallam's pupils are selected on the basis of an application they submit. They talk to younger children about the books they have read and then encourage them to choose other books.

A staff book group has been running for the past two years, again organised by the school's librarian. Ilkeston Library lends copies of books that teaching and non-teaching staff read and discuss at the next meeting. The college's vice principal explains: 'We also use the reading logs used by pupils. The prompts they contain are

a starting point for our discussions and we always end up talking about other books we have read.'

Finally, 'Lakeside Readers' is a small book group for the local community, mainly mothers with young children, that meets twice during each school term.

Springfield School, Portsmouth: Developing extended writing across the curriculum

Introduction

Standards in English on entry to Springfield School are broadly average. However, the school's own analysis suggests that pupils do less well in writing than in reading. For example, in a typical year, around 30 to 40 pupils are assessed at being on Level 3 or below in writing on entry to Year 7, while in reading it is only 15 or 20 who are at this level. Pupils do not always apply the same standards to their writing in English as they do to other areas of the curriculum. At the same time, teachers of different subjects speak of the increased need for pupils to produce extended writing for assessment at GCSE. This has encouraged the school to focus its literacy work on extended writing across the curriculum. There has been a positive impact on pupils' progress and attainment. In 2012, all of the most able met predictions based on their attainment on entry to the school and a significantly greater than average proportion of those in the middle ability band significantly exceeded expectations. Of the year's cohort, 80% gained A* to C grades in English, well above the national average of 66.7%.

Developing extended writing

The school's work in literacy is characterised by a very high level of support from the headteacher and senior leadership team. Discussions with teachers at an early stage revealed that many lacked confidence in their own writing ability, particularly in their understanding of grammar. As a result, the school decided that its training should help teachers to improve the quality of their own writing in order that they should feel more confident in their teaching and their ability to provide effective feedback through marking. The headteacher explained:

> To make progress in this area, the whole staff needed to agree that it remains essential for all young people to be able to write using standard English for a wide range of audiences. We recognised that this could not be delegated to the English department and that, where possible, we needed to provide a consistent response across the school. We constantly review schemes of work to look out for opportunities to provide relevant contexts for extended writing. Successful innovations are shared via our Advanced Teaching and Learning group. The senior team also models this approach through strategic developments such as formal letters of application for prefect status, pupil proposals through the student council, and reports of trips and visits for the newsletter. We are planning further

professional development this year to ensure that all staff know the standard of writing that an English Level 5 or Level 6 writer is capable of achieving. This will help teachers to set a minimum standard for each pupil when extended writing tasks are given. We are also committed to addressing a set of six 'sins' in English, such as the homophones 'there, their and they're', which no teacher will leave uncorrected.

Extended writing across the school

The project was led by a senior leader with secure subject knowledge in English and very strong feelings about the importance of literacy in pupils' work. A decision was taken that it should begin as a pilot project, involving fieldwork with some of the 'less likely' departments; in other words, the school would use developing practice from subjects that were not so reliant on high levels of literacy, as a way of promoting and engaging all teachers in the school. The school believes that the success of the initiative has been at least partly the result of the effective use of classroom teachers across departments and their ability to promote the project to colleagues through sharing good-quality, practical ideas.

The departments involved at this early stage were art, science, music and drama. The effectiveness of work in these areas subsequently made it much easier, as the project developed, to engage teachers from other departments. The initial aim was to gain teachers' trust by dealing head-on with the question 'What's in it for me?' The starting point for these departments was to consider: 'What do pupils need to do to be able to write effectively in my subject?' Teachers were asked to describe the teaching needed to support effective writing in their subject. Having identified suitable extended writing tasks for pupils, departments developed a sequence of lessons for teaching writing, based on materials previously produced by the Secondary National Strategy.

The approach to extended writing for all was promoted explicitly by senior leaders, who understood the need to make the case for literacy through arguments such as these.

- Literacy supports learning. Pupils need vocabulary, expression and organisational control to cope with the cognitive demands of all subjects.

- Writing helps us to sustain and order thought.

- Better literacy leads to improved self-esteem, motivation and behaviour. It allows pupils to learn independently. It is empowering.

- Better literacy raises pupils' attainment in all subjects.

Following this pilot work across a number of departments, all staff met for a training day on literacy. They were able to share examples of good practice in extended writing from the departments involved and tackle teachers' lack of confidence in their own writing and understanding of grammatical issues. There were presentations from the English department about types of writing and rules of basic grammar. In groups, teachers listened to members of the pilot project talking about their work.

Following this, departments met to write a teaching sequence for a piece of extended writing in their own subject and to display key words in their subject. Departments also came together to identify common errors of spelling and grammar in pupils' work that they wished to highlight and correct, both across the school and in their own subject areas. The school followed this up by producing lists for all teachers of pupils' most common spelling mistakes. The English department also made available lists of spellings grouped according to particular linguistic structures, such as words with unstressed vowels or double consonants. A literacy marking policy was agreed. The next step was for individual departments to ensure that extended writing had a secure place in all their schemes of work.

The emphasis on grammar for teachers led to separate guidelines focused on report-writing. The overall impact of this work meant that there is now a much greater concentration within the school on accuracy and correctness in writing, for both pupils and teachers.

Examples of the extended writing work produced across departments include:

- ICT: an evaluation of a Year 9 website and how it might be developed
- PE: writing of a newspaper article on the pros and cons of hosting a major sporting event, to be published in a national tabloid or broadsheet newspaper
- Geography: research into a named country, leading to a written explanation of the effects of physical geography (mountains, weather, oceans…) on the lives of the people there
- Design and technology (graphics): developing an understanding of and writing about the environmental impact of a plastic bottle
- History: an essay on the question, 'How did Hitler achieve and keep power?'

Departments have approached extended writing in different ways. For example, the particular emphasis within history is to use higher-quality extended writing as a way of challenging its most able pupils. History teachers noted that pupils who achieved Level 5 in English were not always doing as well in history as they should. They felt that their previous approach to writing had been too prescriptive. What was needed was a more open-ended approach, setting pupils historical, philosophical and moral questions and asking them to conduct research and to write up their findings in greater detail. This investigative approach places more emphasis on pupils' own choice of topic and also on their need to re-write and improve their work. The approach in history now is to:

- discuss with pupils how writing contributes to their learning in history
- establish for pupils that the writing required is meaningful and important
- see writing as the culmination or expression of learning in history.

Open topics set include, for example, in Year 9: enquiry into which people and events caused the American Civil War; exploration of what brought about Hitler's rise to power; and explanation of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The effects are clear to see in the writing produced by pupils; it is much better researched and more thorough and shows good analysis of complex ideas in order to reach a firm conclusion. The approach to extended writing through open-ended questions is also evident in other subjects. For example, a typical science task is to consider whether we should continue with space exploration or, as a Year 7 topic, to create a newspaper front page that explains solar eclipses. In geography, the topic for discussion might be, 'How successful were the Olympics from an environmental perspective?'

A second development from the training day has been to provide in-class support for identified departments. For example, one issue that arose at an early stage was the variability in pupils' writing across different subjects, related partly at least to teachers' expectations of writing in their subject area. For example, it was found that the quality of writing produced by pupils in drama failed to match that produced in English. This was addressed, at least in part, by attaching an English teacher to work alongside a drama teacher within certain lessons. This raised the profile of English and led to better quality and more informed writing. One girl explained the impact.

> I didn't seem to have an 'English head' on during other lessons. The presence of the English teacher in the lessons made me realise the importance of getting things right when I was writing in my drama lessons.

Literacy events

One principle of the school's approach to extended writing is that, wherever possible, writing should have a clear sense of purpose and audience. As a result, the school has made imaginative use of a series of literacy events and visits to promote 'real' writing. These events involve high-profile visitors, such as Professor Brian Cox, giving informal talks, lectures or presentations. There is a now a shared expectation among pupils that they will respond to these events by producing a significant piece of writing. For example, a children's author, Dan Freedman, visited the school to talk about his life and writing. He read a short extract from one of his books and asked

the pupils to continue the story. On another occasion, the managing director of the Rugby Football Union for Women visited the school to talk about ways of encouraging more girls to take part in sport. As a result, pupils wrote in a number of styles and contexts about girls in sport. Another visit was by an Olympic medallist, who spoke about her work and her experience of competing successfully in the Olympics. This led pupils to write about their own 'Olympic Medal Moments'. Pupils were also involved in the visit of a theatre company, which put on a murder-mystery play in the style of Sherlock Holmes. Pupils were then asked to produce their own murder-mystery narrative, to great effect.

In order to give high status to pupils' writing at these literacy events, each is followed up, where possible, by the publication of an anthology of pupils' writing. This supports other routine publishing of their work within the school. For example, the English department takes every opportunity to enter pupils for writing competitions and publishes their work in regular anthologies. There is an emphasis always on promoting the notion of real-life writing, with genuine audiences and purposes. One outcome has been the Reporters' Club. This meets at lunch time and pupils work together to produce multi-media texts, such as a sports day video. Teachers can commission this group of students to produce work to support their own teaching and learning.

Year 7 writing intervention

Careful analysis of pupils' work enabled the school to identify around 30 pupils in Year 7 operating below Level 4. These pupils were then grouped for additional support depending on the area of their writing weakness. For example, some pupils needed to work on developing their vocabulary, while others needed to work on spelling, paragraphing or sentence-level work. The school's approach to intervention was threefold: weekly withdrawal for a group of pupils based on an identified writing need; additional support in small groups, provided by the special educational needs coordinator; and an after-school literacy club. The intervention worked well and the school's own assessment records showed that a large majority of pupils made good progress. A principle of this intervention work is that it is always provided by teachers rather than teaching assistants.

Stanley Park School, Surrey: Getting it right in Year 7

Introduction

Stanley Park School has a higher than average proportion of pupils supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. It has a dedicated autism unit on site. Standards in English are below average on entry. The school has developed a variety of approaches to help pupils to develop their literacy skills. These include changes to the Key Stage 3 curriculum, intensive intervention and one-to-one support, and whole-school and classroom-based approaches that engage and motivate pupils. The impact can be seen in the very marked fall in persistent absence, from 14.2% in 2011 to 7.9% in 2012.

Changing approaches to literacy in Year 7

Literacy skills on entry to the school have improved across the past few years, and leaders have adapted their approach to whole-school literacy as a result. Historically, the school's focus on developing literacy skills was a result of pupils' attainment on entry being significantly below average. With a decreasing number of pupils who required intensive support, school leaders decided to increase levels of challenge and ensure that the development of literacy skills is securely embedded in all subjects. A revised literacy policy has been written, with action plans stemming from it that are linked to the school's improvement planning. The school is re-focusing its approach to the development of pupils' literacy skills across Key Stage 3 into four key areas. These are:

- literacy in the classroom
- intervention support
- promoting reading
- the wider community.

Literacy in the classroom

The school's competency and skills-based Excellent Futures Curriculum (EFC) is now in its fifth year. The reasons for establishing the EFC are explained by the headteacher.

> The EFC was established as a skills-based curriculum so that pupils would have the skills they needed to access knowledge. Colleagues in school at the time were very clear that pupils needed support to develop a range of skills, including being more independent. Those who were joining the school at the time of the introduction of the EFC had low levels of literacy and so an integrated skills-based approach would be of most benefit to them. Since then, there has been a very clear impact: pupils are much more independent and resilient; they have better communication and teamworking skills; and they are much better equipped to use their skills, including in literacy, in a range of different contexts.

As part of the EFC now, pupils in Years 7 and 8 learn a range of core skills, such as being creative, managing time, showing initiative, understanding and using the skills for writing and problem-solving, as they work through 12 themes. Each theme combines core skills with subject knowledge and expertise. For example, in the autumn term of Year 7, pupils focus on the theme 'Around the World in Six Faiths'. They are encouraged to develop creativity, empathy, understanding and initiative. At the same time, they enquire into aspects of the curriculum for religious education and for geography.

Pupils continue to have separate lessons in English and other subjects. Through the EFC, school leaders emphasise opportunities to learn, develop and apply reading, writing and communication skills in different contexts. Pupils describe, for example, how they have given presentations to large audiences and how they understand better how to communicate effectively in group work and discussions.

Opportunities to develop and apply reading, writing, speaking and listening skills are built into the EFC units. Year 8 pupils study the theme of 'Remembrance', which combines history with the development of these skills. Some examples of literacy-based activities in the programme include:

- researching an international event from a range of different sources, to develop reading and note-taking skills

- using skimming, scanning and reading for meaning to understand, evaluate and compare historical primary and secondary sources

- preparing information for use in a primary school assembly focused on local history, considering the most effective way to present this information – for example through images, role play or music – and justifying these choices

- developing active listening and note-taking skills by listening to radio and watching TV broadcasts to gather information about life in the trenches

- turning notes into an extended piece of writing – such as a diary entry, a letter home or an essay on life in the trenches – with assessment of structure and technical accuracy

- practising group-work skills through a presentation about a form of government in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s.

Tutor time

At least two of the five tutor sessions each week have a focus on developing pupils' reading, writing and communication skills. Each week's focus is on a thought-provoking issue such as animal rights or immigration. These issues are discussed in

tutor time, with the opportunity for teachers and pupils to model how to engage in discussion and debate.

Other activities during tutor time include a 'Making sense of it' project. Pupils develop resources and activities for children in Year 3 that will help them learn about punctuation. Pupils work in pairs to devise an introductory explanation, a worksheet and an answer sheet. They then swap worksheets, complete the tasks and offer some peer assessment. Finally, each pair present their work to the rest of the tutor group. This project helps reinforce the importance of basic punctuation and acts as a reminder of the rules.

In each pupil's planner there are four pages of notes and reminders of different aspects of literacy. These include: words to use when talking about language and texts; approaches to analytical writing; strategies and skills for reading; basic punctuation; and sentence types and structures. One Year 11 pupil explained, 'We use the notes in our planner in some of our lessons. When I'm writing in geography I look in my planner to check that I am using punctuation correctly.'

Intervention support

The school has a highly structured approach to intervention, with an emphasis on literacy in teaching and marking in all subjects. School leaders have adapted their approach to intervention, with some aspects being introduced at the beginning of this academic year, because the literacy levels of pupils on entry to the school are stronger than they have been in the past.

The core literacy leader has explored how a local primary school helps its children to improve their writing skills. He is developing his colleagues' understanding of the 'Big Writing' approach and of how teachers of English and the EFC can apply some of these strategies in Years 7 and 8. An example is the paired reading sessions that are held twice each week with peer mentors, who receive training and coaching on decoding skills and other approaches to support weaker readers. One Year 8 pupil described the impact of the sessions she had in Year 7.

> When I'm in lessons I use the ways my paired reading mentor used to help me work out how to read and work out what words mean – like breaking the word down and looking for words within words. I help my friends now, and I help my relatives when I'm not in school.

Peer mentors are carefully chosen and include those, such as members of the school's football academy, who can be positive role models for younger pupils.

Dedicated one-to-one support is given to those with significant speech, language and communication difficulties. For example, the school's learning support assistants (LSAs) have received training so that they can use a phonics-based approach to help pupils understand how to decode a word and understand the sounds within it. A literacy intervention worker has also been appointed this academic year to support the work of LSAs.

Promoting reading: 'Discover the World'

Pupils in Year 7 have a timetabled reading lesson each week in the library. As well as giving an introduction to library and research skills, the school's librarians support pupils in choosing texts that might interest and challenge them. Each pupil has a reading record used to track levels of engagement and give instant reward. In some library sessions, pupils discuss with a partner what they think of the book they have been reading. At other times, there are tasks to complete by discussion, such as interviewing a character, or through writing, for example by choosing a section of a book and explaining why it was memorable. During the year there is a balance of discussion and writing, exploring fiction and non-fiction. The core literacy leader says that feedback from English teachers – and from pupils – is very positive.

> The discussion and writing activities help pupils to become more engaged and interested in what they are reading, improving their understanding of and approach to different texts.

Visits by authors are also an important aspect of the school's approach to promoting literacy. One author, for example, ran a creative writing workshop. Library borrowing figures show that there was a subsequent increase in borrowing by previously reluctant readers.

Literacy and the wider community

Each parent receives a copy of the school's *How can I help my children to improve their literacy?* The advice includes suggestions about how to engage young people in reading and references to research from the National Literacy Trust. There is also an explanation of the school's 'Marking for Literacy' approach and a reminder to look in planners for each week's literacy focus. The school, in partnership with Sutton College, offers a 'Love Literacy' course, which is a free course for Year 7 parents, with advice and guidance on how best to support their children in developing literacy skills. The course also offers opportunities for parents to develop their own skills.

Woolwich Polytechnic School for Boys, Greenwich: Developing literacy skills for those with English as an additional language

Introduction

Woolwich Polytechnic School for Boys is an inner city boys' school of approximately 1,400 pupils, aged between 11 and 18, in south-east London. Pupils in this ethnically and culturally diverse school arrive with lower-than-average prior attainment. Many have limited English skills. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is more than four times higher than the national average. In 2012, those for whom English is an additional language achieved significantly higher points scores in GCSE English, mathematics and humanities than the average achieved nationally by pupils overall.

Assessment, confidence-building and immersion

The school sees confidence-building and immersion in the school culture as twin priorities for those arriving with very limited knowledge of English. Assessment on entry of Year 7 pupils and also of late entrants records their current levels of language acquisition, how long they have been in the British education system, if at all, and what kind of experience that has been. For some, building up an understanding of the culture and social routines that are reflected in English idiom and vocabulary is as challenging, if not more so, as acquiring the basic skills of literacy.

Teachers in all departments are acutely aware of the demands made on pupils having to learn the language in which they are now being taught as well as having to grasp the essentials of *what* they are being taught in each subject. Link teachers in English and mathematics are consulted to ensure that pupils are placed in appropriate sets, and not placed into lower-ability sets simply because they are not fluent in English. A Polish boy, for example, joined Year 10 with very rudimentary English, but his mathematical ability was recognised and he was placed in the top set. He achieved A for GCSE mathematics, having been set work that was appropriately challenging and given the language support he needed to tackle the syllabus effectively.

It is understood that pupils may be reluctant to speak, read or write in some subjects but not in others, depending on how familiar they are with the lesson content or how comfortable they feel in the class or group. The speed and effectiveness with which pupils learn to socialise beyond the classroom are carefully monitored and shape the programme that is developed to meet their individual needs and abilities.

The Key Stage 3 Induction Programme

The Key Stage 3 Induction Programme, run over a term for those new to English, provides opportunities for pupils to build up the basic skills and the confidence they will need to tackle the mainstream curriculum. The introduction of key concepts and vocabulary and ways of tackling topics and activities in each subject is planned collaboratively and regularly monitored by link teachers.

At this early stage, pupils are encouraged to feel comfortable enough to use their own language to express ideas that they might not be able to communicate confidently in English. The range of languages and cultures represented in the school makes it unusual for there to be no one able to support pupils in their own or a closely related language through these early stages.

Visual cues – for example, pictures of young men wielding long-handled scythes to cut hay, of recruits on parade, and of soldiers silhouetted against a stark landscape of barbed wire and shell holes – are used to help pupils work out the sequence of events in a story and to encourage negotiation, discussion, rehearsal and the presentation of information. Particularly effective are images that resonate in more than one subject area.

Strategies known to be effective in primary schools are adapted to support pupils in these early stages of language acquisition, such as 'talk frames'. Talk frames include the use of prompts such as 'What might you see/hear/think? How do you know this is the first/next/last paragraph?' The focus is on encouraging the development of appropriate vocabulary and style, with teachers modelling good practice so that pupils are guided in what is required.

Even with very little English, pupils are able to complete tasks that require a high level of thinking, imagining and problem-solving if they are given well-structured support and strategies that enable them to build on their prior knowledge. The following case study gives a flavour of how this approach works.

> Z is a Pashto speaker who started at the school at the beginning of Year 7, after a disrupted education in Afghanistan. When he joined the school, he was shy, with low self-esteem and very little confidence. He went through a silent period that lasted approximately seven months, causing concern that he might have specific learning needs in addition to the challenge presented by acquiring a new language and adapting to a very different culture. He could use actions to show that he understood simple instructions. He could recognise some letters of the alphabet. He knew that English is read from left to right. Initially, he was put into a small set taught by primary specialists and with strong EAL support. During morning registration, he was given one-to-one help with reading and homework. By the end of Year 7 he had become settled and much happier. He would answer confidently and could express his ideas in writing that was clear and thoughtfully organised.

All those involved in planning and teaching the induction programme follow clear guidelines that ensure consistency of approach. These are a distillation of established good practice.

For speaking and listening:

- plan 'talk' into all lessons, ensuring that it engages all pupils, is purposeful and structured and that individual contributions are monitored and developed

- encourage pupils to draw on their own experiences and to use their own language if they are struggling to convey an idea or feeling in English

- give pupils time to rehearse their contributions, so that they are less anxious

- systematically introduce key vocabulary and phrases

- model good speaking and listening, demonstrating high expectations.
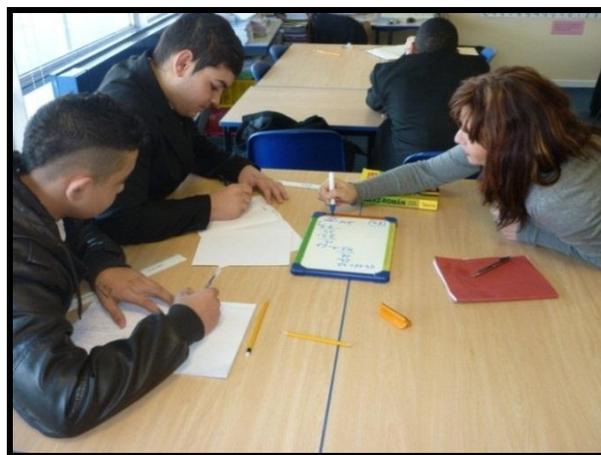
For writing:

- provide a structure pupils can use when planning their own writing

- introduce the task with discussion of key words and phrases, ensuring that pupils build up a reservoir of relevant vocabulary

- model the activity, inviting pupils to discuss how the teacher's model meets the task's objectives or how it might be improved

- reassure pupils in the very early stages of English acquisition that they may write in their own language and then, with help, discuss in English what they were trying to communicate.

The next stage

Many of the pupils at the school are bilingual, fluent orally but often less secure in their writing. Their progress is monitored through Raising Attainment Plan (RAP) meetings. For these pupils, the emphasis is on targeted intervention to support and develop literacy skills identified as relatively weak across the curriculum or in one or two subjects.

Intervention groups focus on a specific area, for example, consolidating and extending writing. Activities often include work on sentence structure and punctuation and, for many C/D borderline GCSE pupils, on learning to match the verb form both with the subject and with the prevailing tense being used in a passage.

Home links

All at the school recognise that language development at home is as important as at school. To this end, leaders, teachers and pastoral staff ensure that language and educational support does not end at the school gates. Regular meetings are held with the major ethnic groups of parents – Nigerian, Somali and Nepalese – and specific needs and methods of support are discussed. This helps to break down language barriers and to provide continuation of learning outside school, even where English is not spoken in the pupil's home. There are members of staff from all the school's key ethnic groups who can speak native languages and understand the cultural backgrounds of pupils' families.

The headteachers see confident understanding and use of language as holding the key to learning and to pupils' life chances.

> Literacy is language and language is life.

> We are here to change lives for the better.

Conclusion: What works in the survey schools – 10 principles of good practice

Literacy was at the heart of learning in every one of the survey schools, with each working successfully in an individual way and with particular priorities.

There was no one way of 'getting it right'. Approaches varied from school to school and depended on the needs of pupils and the skills, knowledge and experience of staff. In one school the emphasis was on extended writing. Another school realised from its entry assessments that the issue was more to do with pupils' confidence in speaking and listening. Enabling pupils with very little English to settle confidently and have access to the full curriculum was a key priority in another. Some schools gave the leadership responsibility to English teachers, while others pursued a different route. Some schools established literacy coordinators and working parties while others treated literacy as a whole-staff teaching and learning issue.

There are many possible routes to the same outcome: effective practice across all subjects. Nevertheless, this report identifies features that characterise the effective practice across all seven survey schools.

Setting literacy issues firmly within the teaching and learning debate

Literacy initiatives are less likely to be successful where literacy is seen as something separate from normal mainstream teaching and learning. For this reason, some schools prefer not to talk about literacy but to refer to 'language for learning', for example. Literacy, or language for learning, needs to be seen as an integral element of all good teaching. Literacy should be a constant item on the agenda when issues of effective teaching and learning are discussed. The issue for all teachers is, therefore, 'How can I use language for learning effectively to improve achievement in my subject?' A challenge for all school leaders is to ensure that teachers not only ask that question but have the skills and commitment needed to demonstrate through their planning, teaching and assessment of pupils' work that they know the answer and can put it into practice.

No quick fix

How long does it take to effect any significant change in literacy practice? In the successful schools visited, literacy had become a permanent feature of their development planning. There was no attempt to address literacy through a one-off training day for staff and the display of key words around classrooms. Literacy had become an integral part of longer-term school improvement plans and informed the content of action plans for each subject. It frequently involved governors and sometimes became a performance management target for teachers. This survey confirms that there is no quick fix with literacy but that clear aims, strong commitment and a sense of urgency produce positive results.

The active support of headteacher and senior leaders for cross-curricular literacy learning

While this may be an obvious point, it remains an important one. This report illustrates the importance of active leadership by headteachers and other senior leaders in making the case for literacy. In the survey schools, headteachers cared about literacy and ensured that it remained a constant topic of discussion. They modelled its importance in different ways, perhaps themselves training older pupils to be literacy tutors or themselves teaching intervention sessions. Staff all knew that literacy was something of importance to the school leadership. It was evident in everything that the headteacher and other senior leaders did and said. It was central to the school's vision and its improvement planning.

Making the case for literacy in all subjects: showing 'what's in it for us?'

Teachers are busy and hard-working people. They have challenges in their own subject area. Senior leaders should not assume that all teachers will welcome and embrace cross-curricular literacy initiatives. The link between literacy and more effective learning in every subject area needs to be established clearly and explicitly. The case for literacy needs to be made carefully and with a sensitive understanding of individual subjects' different needs. The starting point for all teachers should be: 'What literacy skills do students in my subject need and what approaches to language learning will help me to be an effective teacher of my subject?' An emphasis on writing, for example, may need to be carefully negotiated in order to ensure that the very different needs of teachers in, say, history, mathematics and music are equally met.

Use of specialist knowledge to support individual teachers and departments

In the survey schools, there were different views about the role to be played in literacy by the English specialists. It is clear that any literacy initiative needs to be seen as addressing a whole-school priority rather than assisting English teachers to 'do their job'. Nevertheless, English teachers are (or should be) specialists in the use of language and in an understanding of grammar. The same is often true of teachers of modern foreign languages. Other teachers may lack confidence at times in their own use of English. Accordingly, in successful schools, good use is made of specialists from English and other subjects to support the development of effective strategies. It is important to ensure that these specialists are committed to cross-curricular literacy. Equally important is to provide time and resources for close collaboration with other teachers in the development of practical strategies and schemes of work.

Learning from each other and sharing good practice across the curriculum

This report describes how one school deliberately started its literacy work with some of the more 'unlikely' departments. This was not the case elsewhere. What was

consistent was the intention to identify good practice across all areas and disseminate it. Physical education teachers, for example, often manage discussion and small-group work very effectively. Teachers of subjects other than English often find real contexts for language that engage pupils and help to get something practical done, for example in design and technology or drama. All teachers are likely to be enthused by hearing about something that works in another subject area – especially if it's not English. The use of literacy advocates or specialists in different departments can work well in some schools.

Embedding good practice in schemes of work and development planning

It is one thing to identify an opportunity for a piece of extended writing in a particular subject. It is another to extend this across all schemes of work and establish departmental agreements about the teaching of writing in each subject that will have a positive impact on pupils' work. Effective teachers are constantly devising practical and engaging subject-specific activities that develop pupil's reading, writing, speaking and listening without 'improving literacy' being the stated learning objective. Teachers need collectively to know about the good practice going on in their own school and to recognise how this might be translated into equally effective literacy-boosting activities in their own subject area. Such cross-fertilisation can and should provide the basis for whole-school development planning for literacy to be implemented consistently across all subjects, with each subject maintaining its individual character.

Making full use of the library and librarian

In every school in the survey there were successful measures to involve the library and ensure that the librarian had an important role in developing reading. This is common sense, building on the specialist knowledge that librarians possess. Where librarians are fully integrated into the management structure of the school, they have an opportunity to influence debate and to enhance the library's contribution to pupils' progress. Many of the imaginative programmes to encourage reading that inspectors see are inspired by a good librarian.

Systematic and effective monitoring and evaluation

Improvements in literacy are not always easy to identify. While, for example, many schools have introduced some form of reading within tutorial time, it is less common to find schools that can speak clearly about the impact of this initiative. For example, if 20 minutes every day are set aside for reading, can the school be sure that the approach amounts to good value for time and money? Are all groups of pupils engaged? What about the poor reader who sits and pretends to read? What about the keen reader who reads for hours outside school? What about the teacher who is not a keen reader and remains uncommitted to the idea? Similarly, the fact that there is more extended writing going on in the school does not in itself ensure that the quality of writing is any better. 'Doing' more is not enough; it is essential to establish that good learning is also taking place, and that can be a complex process.

Recognising that there's no one way to get it right

The case studies show how different schools established successful cross-curricular literacy initiatives, sharing some common principles but each approaching the challenge in a way that grew out of its particular context. Schools should not try to transplant, unchanged, one of the approaches described here, although there is much to be learnt from each case study. The summary of good practice below makes it clear that success in promoting literacy does not require extravagant or exotic strategies. Schools should:

- involve all teachers and demonstrate how they are all engaged in using language to promote learning in their subject

- identify the particular needs of all pupils in reading, writing, speaking and listening

- make strong links between school and home

- plan for the longer term, emphasising the integral relationship between language for learning and effective teaching in all subjects.

> To be literate is to gain a voice and to participate meaningfully and assertively in decisions that affect one's life. To be literate is to gain self-confidence. To be literate is to become self-assertive…Literacy enables people to read their own world and to write their own history... Literacy provides access to written knowledge – and knowledge is power. In a nutshell, literacy empowers.[16]

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[16] Y Kassam, 'Who benefits from illiteracy? Literacy and empowerment' in *The challenge of illiteracy: from reflection to action*, Garland Publishing, New York, 1994; cited in *Literacy changes lives: an advocacy resource*, National Literacy Trust, 2008; www.literacytrust.org.uk/research/nlt_research/243_literacy_changes_lives_an_advocacy_resource.

Further information

This good practice survey grew out of visits by inspectors to seven secondary schools, mainly between June and October, 2012. Inspection evidence had previously shown each school to be effective in promoting pupils' literacy across the curriculum. After discussion with the visiting inspector, each school provided a brief account of its distinctive approach, explaining the rationale underpinning its planning and strategies, and evaluating its impact.

The following texts were referred to in the report.

Charlotte's Web by E B White, HarperCollins, 2012. (First published 1952.)

Divergent by Veronica Roth, HarperCollins, 2012.

Germinal by Emile Zola, translated by Roger Pearson, Penguin Classics, 2004. (First published in French in 1885.)

Lord of the Flies by William Golding, Faber, 1954.

Private Peaceful by Michael Morpurgo, HarperCollins, 2004.

Rumble in the Jungle by Giles Andreae and David Wojtowycz, Orchard Books, 1998.

The Bar Code Tattoo by Suzanne Weyn, Scholastic, 2004.

The Giver by Lois Lowry, HarperCollins Essential Modern Classics, 2012. (First published 1993.)

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Attwood, Vintage, 2007. (First published 1985.)

The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins, Scholastic, 2008.

The Knife of Never Letting Go by Patrick Ness, Walker, 2008.

The Maze Runner by James Dasher, Delacorte, 2009.

The White Darkness by Geraldine McCaughrean, HarperTeen, 2007.

Annex: Providers visited

School	Local authority area
Angmering School	West Sussex
Chenderit School	Northamptonshire
The City Academy	Hackney
Kirk Hallam Community, Technology and Sports College	Derbyshire
Springfield School	Portsmouth
Stanley Park School	Surrey
Woolwich Polytechnic School for Boys	Greenwich