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Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

Literacy in key stage 3

June 2012



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Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

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

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Context

Purpose of the report

- 1 This report is the first of a series in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit to Estyn for 2011-2012. It looks at standards in literacy at key stage 3 and how a sample of secondary schools is currently developing pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum. Later reports will focus on the implementation and impact of the National Literacy Programme on standards and provision in these schools. The National Literacy and Numeracy Framework will be made available for consultation from June 2012. The final version will be published in January 2013. The National Literacy and Numeracy Framework will become a statutory requirement in all schools from September 2013.
- 2 The report is intended for the Welsh Government, headteachers and practitioners in schools and local authority officers and advisers. It may also be of interest to teacher trainers and to church diocesan education authorities.

Background

- 3 The Chief Inspector's Annual Report and survey reports in recent years have reported that too many pupils have a weak grasp of literacy skills. Poor literacy skills affect not just the achievements of learners in Welsh or English but also their ability to make good progress in other areas of the curriculum. Even when pupils attain well in external assessments in Welsh or English, their literacy skills are not always secure enough for them to apply these fully and confidently in a wide range of contexts.
- 4 In September 2010, the Welsh Government introduced Essential Skills Wales qualifications to provide a single ladder of progression in skills from entry level 1 to level 4. The assessment of skills qualifications since 2005 has been by an internally-assessed portfolio of evidence whereas previously it included an externally marked test. Most learners gain communications qualifications in key stage 4 or post-16, although more schools are now preparing key stage 3 pupils, particularly in Year 9 for level 1 or level 2 qualifications.
- 5 The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a survey of the educational achievement of 15-year-olds organised by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The survey takes place every three years and assesses pupils' skills in reading, mathematics and science. In each survey, one of these areas is the main subject. Reading was the main subject in the most recent survey, in 2009. Overall, Wales performed worse than the other home countries in the PISA survey and was ranked 38th out of the 67 countries taking part in the study.
- 6 The Welsh Government has developed a National Literacy Programme, which will include introducing a statutory National Literacy and Numeracy Framework to replace the developing communication and developing number across the curriculum components of the Skills Framework for pupils from the Foundation Phase to the end of key stage 3, together with national reading and numeracy tests for pupils from Year 2 to Year 9.

- 7 For this report, inspectors visited a representative sample of 21 secondary schools across Wales inspected by Estyn between 2007 and 2009. These schools will be revisited over the next two years. The findings from these visits, national performance data and outcomes from inspections will be used to report on the implementation and impact of the National Literacy Programme in these schools.

Main findings

- 8 This report is the first of a series that look at standards in literacy at key stage 3 and how schools are developing pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum. Later reports will focus on the implementation and impact of the National Literacy Programme by revisiting the same sample of secondary schools.

Nationally

- 9 In most secondary schools inspected from September 2010, pupils listen well in lessons and respond readily to questions orally, although in about one-in-ten schools their responses are too brief and superficial. Many pupils read with understanding, and extract and interpret information well. However, in a few schools, a minority of pupils have limited reading skills and this affects their progress. Often, in these schools, more able pupils do not have enough opportunities to analyse complex reading texts.
- 10 In about three-quarters of secondary schools inspected from September 2010, most pupils write clearly for an appropriate range of different purposes and audiences. In about a quarter of schools, standards of pupils' writing are not as good as their reading or oracy. In these cases, pupils do not produce enough extended writing across the curriculum and make basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- 11 Around 40% of learners enter secondary schools in Year 7 with reading ages significantly (at least six months) below their chronological age. Around 20% of these learners are not functionally literate, with reading ages of below nine and a half years.
- 12 The National Curriculum teacher assessments at the end of key stage 2 and the reading age tests measure progress differently. This makes it difficult to make comparisons between reading ages and pupils' reading skills. Until the introduction of a national reading test in 2013, Wales will not have robust, comparable data on learners' literacy levels. Currently, schools and local authorities use different tests and measure literacy levels in different ways.
- 13 The percentage of key stage 3 pupils achieving the expected National Curriculum level 5 or above in English in 2011 continues the steady improvement from previous years. There was a similar improvement in the percentage of pupils achieving level 5 or above in Welsh first language. In 2011, Welsh first language is the highest performing core subject at level 5. However, at all National Curriculum levels, performance in English is lower than that in other core subjects.

- 14 As in other key stages, girls perform better than boys at the expected and higher National Curriculum levels in both English and Welsh. At key stage 3, there is over 13 percentage points' difference between girls' and boys' performance at the expected level.
- 15 An increasing number of secondary schools are planning opportunities for learners to gain Essential Skills Wales communication qualifications in key stage 3. At present, in one-in-six schools, many learners in Year 8 and Year 9 gain level 1 in communication. In a very few schools, pupils in Year 9 gain level 2 communication qualifications. However, gaining these qualifications does not necessarily mean that pupils are applying these skills consistently across the curriculum. In the best practice, a few schools ensure that pupils continue to demonstrate these skills across all subjects through skilful teaching.

In the surveyed schools

- 16 A minority of schools have carried out an audit of pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum to see whether subjects identify and provide opportunities for pupils to develop these skills. In a few schools that have conducted audits, there is a strong emphasis on developing literacy skills in development plans and subject schemes of work. Where schools have developed whole-school training on specific literacy strategies, schemes of work across the curriculum are more consistent in highlighting the precise reading, writing and oracy skills to be taught. In a majority of schools, subject schemes of work do not have enough detail about how literacy skills are to be taught.
- 17 Many schools have well-defined procedures for assessing pupils' reading abilities and arrangements to support those with reading ages significantly below their chronological age. However, only a minority of schools record the percentage of pupils on literacy intervention programmes who achieve level 5 at the end of key stage 3. Of these schools, an average of 37% of these pupils go on to achieve level 5.
- 18 More schools use computer-based programmes to track the reading and spelling age data of key stage 3 pupils in order to monitor their progress. However, few schools monitor the progress of pupils with reading ages above their chronological age to check whether they have enough opportunities to develop their literacy skills further.
- 19 Many schools have responded well to the increased emphasis on skills in National Curriculum Subject Orders and use whole-school approaches to the teaching of reading, writing and oracy as a major focus for training.
- 20 All schools surveyed have literacy co-ordinators who are responsible for co-ordinating whole-school approaches and a senior leader who is responsible for literacy at a strategic level. A minority of these co-ordinators are new to their role and it is too early to judge the impact of their leadership on improving standards.
- 21 There are networks of professional practice with a focus on literacy in all of the schools visited but it is too early to judge their effectiveness. A few schools are developing a progressive approach to improving literacy by training teachers in

literacy strategies as part of a three year plan. In these schools, working groups, in partnership with local authority advisers or independent consultants, have led to useful whole-school training for staff on reading, writing and oracy within the past year.

- 22 Improving literacy is a main priority in many school development plans. However, in a few schools surveyed, development plans do not include objectives for improving literacy standards across the school. In only a minority of schools is there a clear focus on literacy in monitoring and evaluation procedures.

Recommendations

Schools should:

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

Local authorities should:

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

The Welsh Government should:

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

Standards in literacy

Literacy outcomes in school inspections

- 23 During the last cycle of inspections of secondary schools, inspectors evaluated standards of communication skills on a five-point scale. This evaluation was based on general observations of oracy, reading and writing skills in lesson observations and book scrutiny. Between 2005 and 2010, standards of communication skills in English at key stage 3 fluctuated, but there was a general upward trend in the percentage of schools graded good or better. At the start of the cycle, 64% of English-medium secondary schools had good or better standards of communication skills, compared with 73% of schools at the end of the cycle. Standards in communication skills in Welsh-medium schools also fluctuated over the last cycle and were generally higher than English communication skills.
- 24 In the current cycle of school inspections from September 2010, inspectors evaluate standards of literacy skills as one aspect of the standards quality indicator. In about one-in-eight secondary schools, where standards in general are excellent, pupils use their literacy skills very effectively. For example, they read and synthesise information well and present it in a variety of styles for different audiences. Pupils in most schools listen well in lessons and are responsive, although in about one-in-ten schools their responses are too brief and superficial. Many pupils, across most schools, read with understanding and they can extract and interpret information well. However, in a few schools, a minority of pupils have limited reading skills and this affects their progress. Often, in these schools, more able pupils do not have enough opportunities to analyse complex reading texts.
- 25 In about three-quarters of secondary schools, where they are given good opportunities, pupils write clearly for an appropriate range of different purposes and audiences. For example, pupils write detailed explanations of events in humanities subjects. In about a quarter of secondary schools, standards of pupils' writing are not as good as they are in other aspects of literacy. In these cases, pupils do not produce enough extended writing across the curriculum and make basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

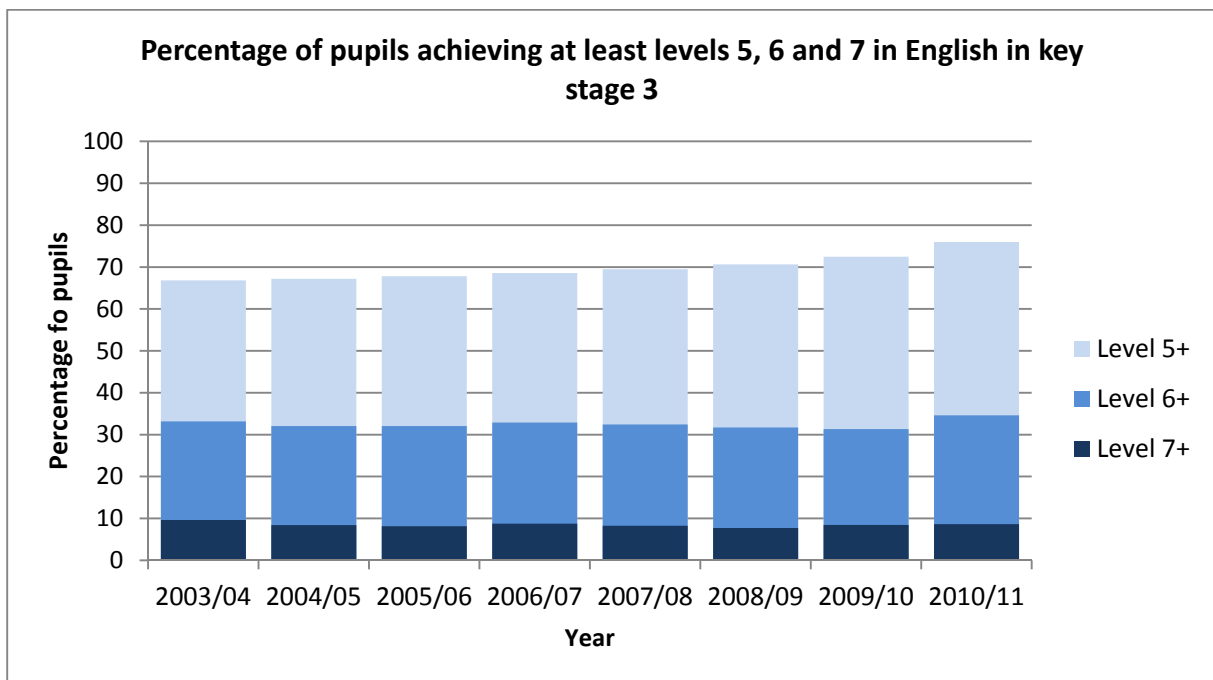
Reading ability at the start of key stage 3

- 26 Around 40% of learners enter secondary schools in Year 7 with reading ages that are significantly below their chronological age. Around 20% of these learners are not functionally literate, with reading ages of below nine and a half years. Many schools administer reading tests within the first two months of learners entering Year 7. While many schools find the reading age information from Year 6 to be very useful if they receive it, a minority of schools do not receive reading age data from primary schools.
- 27 Learners' reading ages may be lower than expected at the beginning of Year 7 due to the summer holiday break. Schools should take account of this and use the six months' confidence level when assessing learners' reading ages.

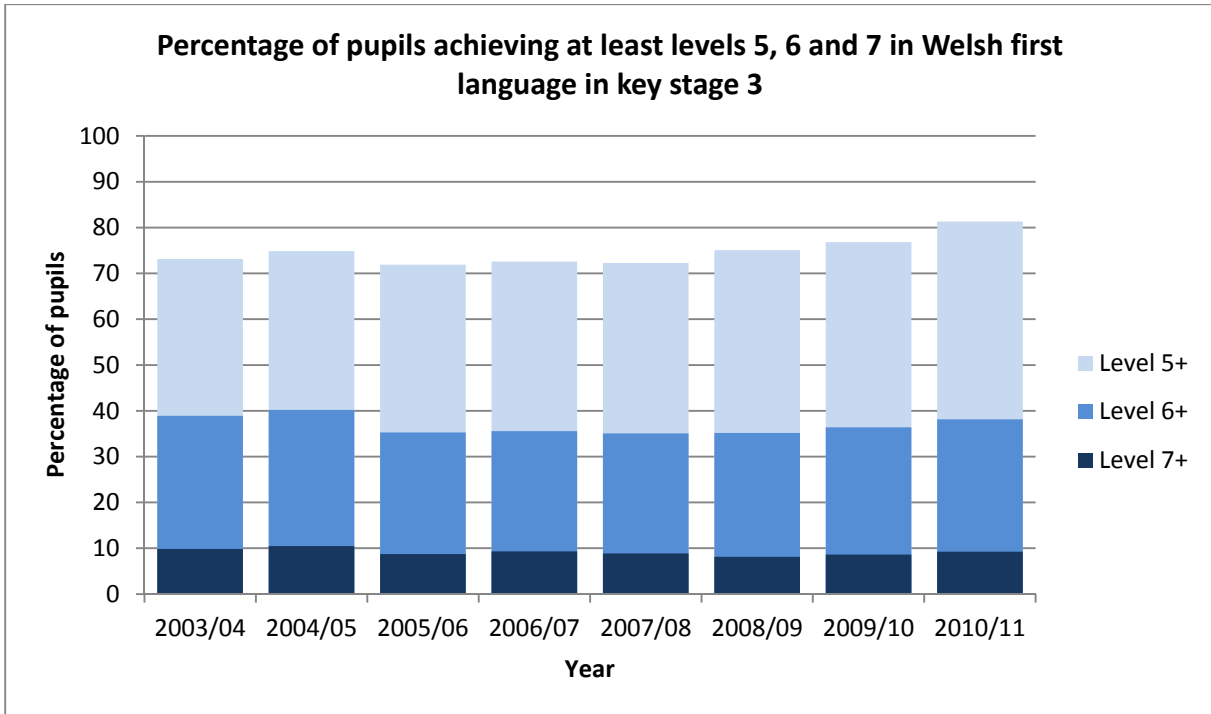
- 28 A wide variety of reading tests are used and this makes it difficult to compare the outcomes of tests to assess pupils' reading abilities. Until the introduction of the national reading test in 2013, Wales does not have robust, comparable data on learners' literacy levels because schools and local authorities measure them in different ways. This limits the ability of teachers to identify and plan the support that individual learners need, especially at transition to the secondary school.

Standards in reading, writing and oracy in National Curriculum teacher assessments

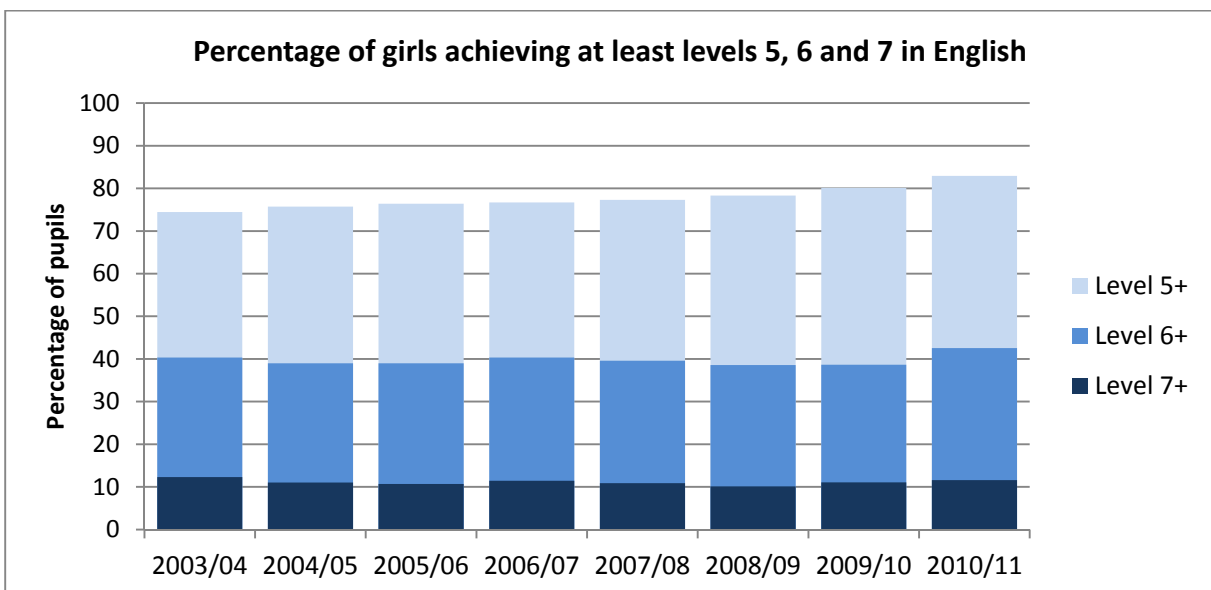
- 29 National Curriculum English and Welsh teacher assessments at key stage 3 give an indication of the standard of literacy skills within these subjects. Until the introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework, these standards are used as the only measure to evaluate language skills at key stage 3 in all schools.
- 30 Below are two charts that show the percentages of pupils achieving levels 5, 6 and 7 in English and Welsh over the past eight years.



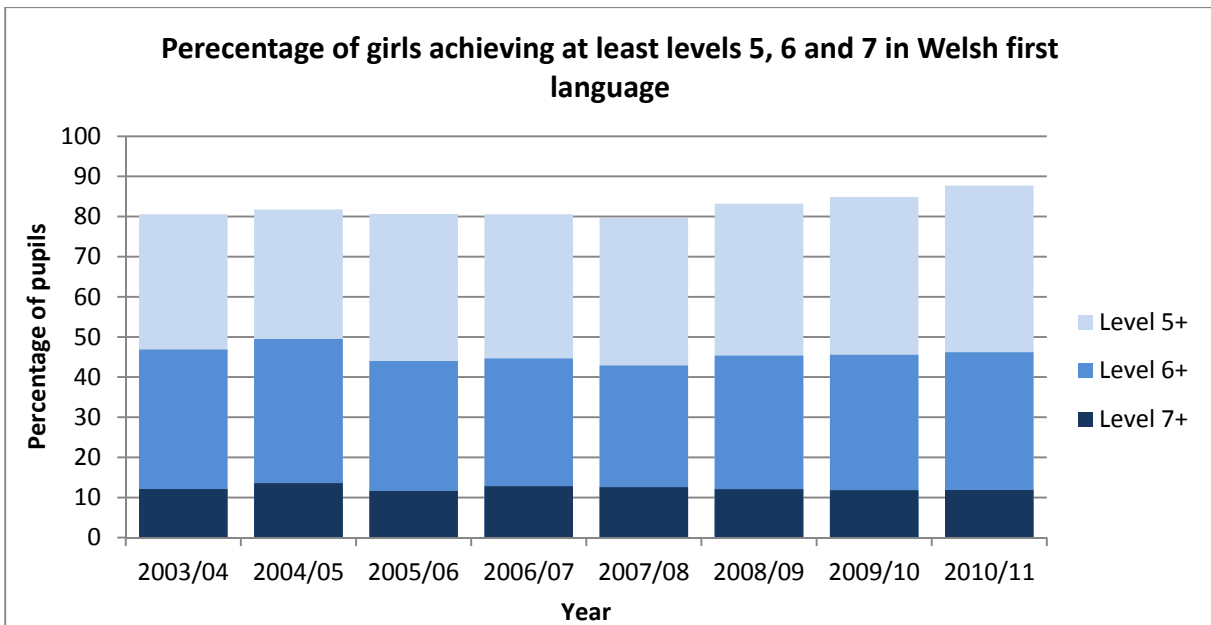
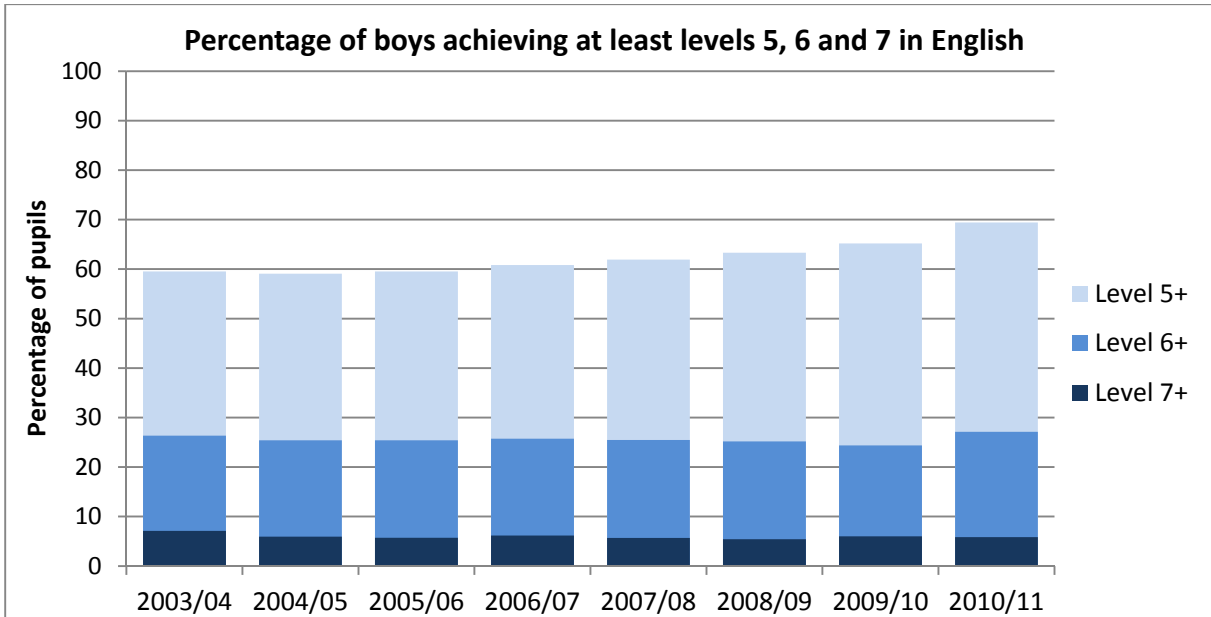
- 31 The percentage of key stage 3 pupils achieving the expected level 5 or above in English in 2011 continued to improve steadily on previous years.

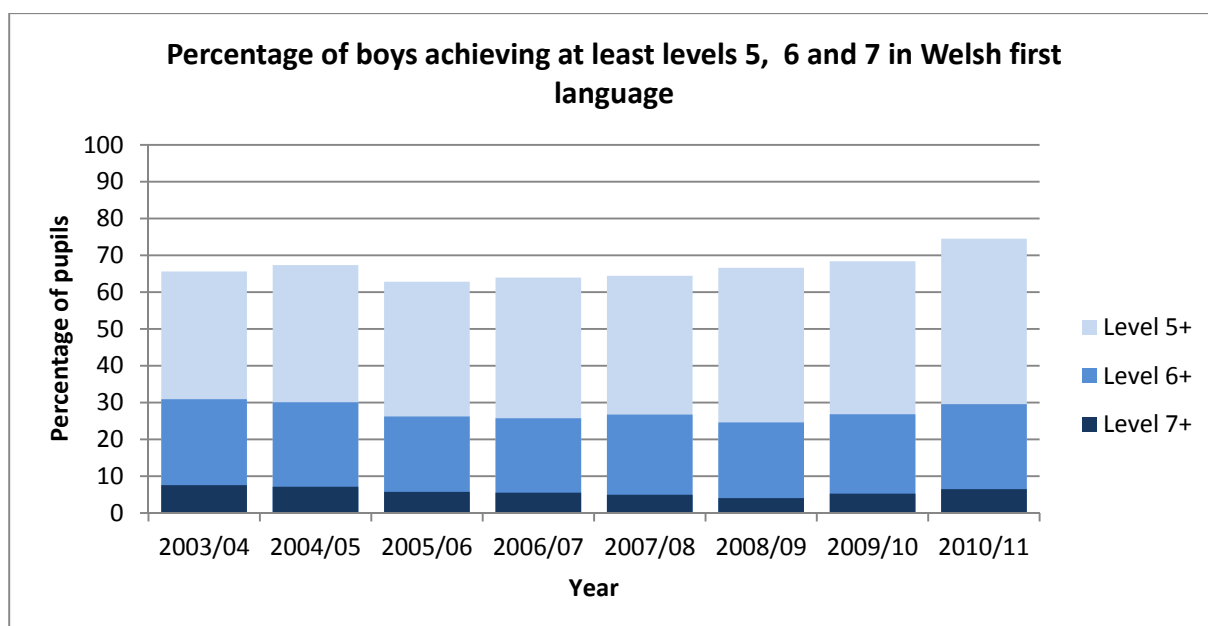


- 32 There was a similar improvement in the percentage of pupils achieving level 5 or above in Welsh first language from 76.8% in 2010 to 81.3% in 2011.
- 33 At all levels, performance in English is lower than that in the other core subjects. At levels 6 and 7 there has been a slight improvement in 2010 and 2011 following a fluctuating trend since 2004. However, Welsh first language is the highest performing core subject.
- 34 There were improvements of more than three percentage points in the proportion of pupils achieving level 5 or above in reading and writing in English and of more than four percentage points in reading and writing in Welsh first language in 2011. However, standards in writing in English remain below those in reading. In Welsh first language, standards of writing are lower than those of reading or oracy.



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- 35 As in other key stages, girls perform better than boys at the expected and higher levels in both English and Welsh. At key stage 3, there is a difference of over 13 percentage points between girls' and boys' performance at the expected level in both English and Welsh. This gap has reduced slightly over the past three years.
- 36 About one-in-ten pupils who achieve the expected level 4 in reading and writing at the end of key stage 2 do not make enough progress to achieve the expected level 5 by the end of key stage 3.

Communication qualifications

- 37 More secondary schools offer opportunities for learners to gain communication qualifications in key stage 3. There are several reasons for schools to introduce qualifications at key stage 3, particularly to increase pupils' self-esteem. Schools that enter Year 9 pupils for level 1 communication qualifications often do this as an introduction to taking level 2 skills qualifications as part of the Welsh Baccalaureate intermediate qualification at key stage 4.
- 38 In one-in-six schools, many learners in Year 8 and Year 9 gain level 1 in communication. In a very few schools, many pupils in Year 9 gain level 2 communication qualifications. In the schools inspected between September 2010 and December 2011, Year 9 learners gain level 1 or level 2 communication qualifications in only around one-in-seven schools. However, a further one-in-seven schools plan to enter Year 9 learners by the end of the academic year. Overall, key stage 3 learners are currently studying communication qualifications in one-in-three schools.
- 39 The fact that more pupils at key stage 3 have communications qualifications at level 1 or 2 does not necessarily mean that they are applying these skills consistently at these levels across all subjects. In the best practice, a few schools ensure that pupils continue to demonstrate these skills across the curriculum through skilful teaching.

PISA reading results

- 40 In the PISA test of reading, pupils in Wales generally did well on assessments of non-continuous texts (such as charts, graphs, tables, maps and forms). This may reflect changes to the National Curriculum programmes of study for English from 2008, which have increased the use of non-fiction texts.
- 41 However, PISA results indicate that a high proportion of pupils in Wales do not have good enough skills to tackle assessments based on continuous text. This calls for reading 'stamina' and an ability to interpret information. In PISA, there was a direct link between high outcomes and attitude and the amount of time spent reading recreationally. Very high proportions of pupils in Wales reported in the PISA survey that they do not like reading and do not engage in reading on a frequent basis. This has implications for key stage 3 in creating opportunities across the curriculum to engage pupils in reading widely and providing a wide range of reading materials for whole-class and independent study, as well as encouraging pupils to read at home.
- 42 PISA reading tests are very different from National Curriculum reading assessments at key stage 3. In PISA there are multiple-choice questions for pupils to interpret and select the most appropriate response. These do not occur in English or Welsh National Curriculum assessments in key stage 3. PISA requires more general skills in paraphrasing content and giving brief opinions. The texts used for PISA reading tests are mainly those found in subjects other than English. Non-continuous texts chosen for the PISA reading tests, such as charts, graphs, tables and maps, are more commonly found in science or humanities subjects in Wales. This suggests that all subjects across the curriculum have a place in explicitly teaching skills in understanding, interpreting and evaluating information. This has implications too for whole-school planning for the teaching of literacy to ensure that key stage 3 pupils are more familiar with reading a range of texts and that they can interpret and analyse texts in more subjects than just English.

Literacy standards in lessons and pupils' work in the surveyed schools

- 43 For this survey, inspectors visited Year 9 lessons in science or humanities subjects. Pupils were taught in mixed ability classes for many of these lessons and given the same reading materials and writing tasks. In a majority of lessons, pupils:
- show confidence in expressing and explaining their views;
 - analyse passages and formed clear judgements;
 - use strategies to decode unfamiliar words when reading;
 - check their written work for accuracy of expression;
 - write at length, with variety in their presentation of information; and
 - explain scientific terms clearly.
- 44 In a minority of lessons, pupils show a limited understanding of key subject vocabulary and struggle to read texts that are too demanding for their level of literacy. A few pupils struggle to express themselves clearly or are reluctant to give detailed responses to questions. In a few lessons, pupils do not extend their written responses and do not check or correct spelling and grammatical mistakes in their writing.
- 45 Inspectors scrutinised a sample of Year 9 pupils' work in English or Welsh, science and humanities subjects. Generally, pupils use subject-specific vocabulary well and write for a wide variety of purposes and audiences in these subjects. In humanities subjects, pupils make good use of charts to structure their ideas and re-present information in their own words for different purposes, for example in writing a persuasive letter. However, in a minority of books from all subjects sampled, pupils continue to make errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar and do not write at length, particularly when completing worksheets. Often this is because the worksheets limit the amount of extended writing as boxes for pupils to write their responses are too small. As a result, more able pupils, in particular, do not develop their writing skills through more challenging tasks.
- 46 These results match the findings from inspections since September 2010 and show that a minority of schools are not focusing enough on whole-school strategies to improve writing skills, particularly promoting extended responses and accuracy of written work. In these schools, there is not enough monitoring and evaluation of literacy skills developments to ensure that reading and writing tasks are pitched at the right level for all pupils.

Ensuring progression in literacy skills across key stage 3 in the surveyed schools

Provision for literacy skills progression across the curriculum

- 47 Improving skills was identified as a recommendation or an important area for development in around a third of secondary schools since September 2010.
- 48 Auditing pupils' literacy skills is a priority in a majority of school improvement plans. However, only a minority of schools have carried out an audit of pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum to ensure that subjects identify and provide opportunities for pupils to develop these skills. A majority of schools do not identify and map specific aspects of reading and writing to be developed progressively. In these schools, staff do not know which skills are to be taught or when. English departments do not always plan their schemes of work to ensure that reading and writing tasks can support the development of whole-school literacy strategies, for example by teaching the main conventions of forms of writing so that pupils can apply these in other subjects.
- 49 In a few schools, there is a strong emphasis on developing literacy skills in development plans and subject schemes of work. Where schools have developed whole-school training on literacy strategies, schemes of work across the curriculum consistently highlight the precise reading, writing and oracy skills to be taught. In these schools, schemes of work for humanities and science subjects provide a wide range of activities to develop extended reading and writing.
- 50 In a majority of schools, subject schemes of work do not have enough detail about literacy skills. Often, the references to literacy or communication are too generalised and many subjects merely refer to literacy by using the developing communication icon, rather than giving details about the reading, writing or oracy skills to be developed. This leads to missed opportunities in subjects other than English to develop pupils' higher-order reading skills or provide a range of writing tasks. There are too few opportunities for extended writing in subject schemes of work in a minority of schools. In a few schools, English schemes of work are too focused on literature-based reading and writing tasks and do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to read and write non-fiction texts, which would support literacy across the curriculum.
- 51 Schemes of work and specific tasks are adapted clearly to suit the needs of different abilities in only a minority of schools. In a few schools, over-use of worksheets limits the ability of more able pupils to extend and develop their written responses. Booklets of photocopied resources and similar reading and writing tasks given to all pupils across the ability range do not help less able pupils to develop their understanding or stretch more able pupils.
- 52 While many secondary schools share reading-age information and details about pupils who have been on literacy intervention programmes with their partner primary schools so that they can continue this support, only half of secondary schools have

'bridging' units of work that continue from Year 6 into Year 7. Many of these bridging units are planned and assessed through English or Welsh. A few have a clear literacy focus with a more cross-curricular topic, such as the Olympics.

- 53 A few schools have well-established links with their primary schools and arrange joint training days for teachers, to focus on jointly developing aspects of literacy, such as writing strategies or developing reading skills.

Teaching and assessment

- 54 In this survey, inspectors visited Year 9 lessons in science or humanities subjects. In a majority of the lessons observed, teachers make deliberate use of literacy strategies to engage pupils at a level appropriate for their ability. These include supporting pupils in skimming, scanning and synthesising information read; developing inference and note-making skills from different sources of evidence read in history; and using group work to help pupils discuss prior knowledge at the start of a scientific investigation. In these lessons, teachers:
- develop pupils' understanding of subject vocabulary, often through exploring the origin of these words;
 - ask probing questions to develop pupils' understanding of key features of forms of writing, such as persuasive leaflets or diaries;
 - provide opportunities for pupils to read and summarise information from a range of texts;
 - give structured support in developing extended writing tasks, which are appropriate for all abilities; and
 - present helpful bilingual displays of pupils' written work, showing examples of writing for different purposes and audiences, such as newspaper reports, propaganda posters, diary entries and leaflets.
- 55 In a minority of lessons, teachers do not give enough attention to developing pupils' higher-order reading and writing skills. In these lessons teachers do not:
- understand or use literacy strategies to help pupils to improve their reading or writing skills within the subject, such as highlighting text to develop higher-order reading skills by noting the most salient passages or information;
 - use information on pupils' reading ages to present appropriate reading material that pupils can understand, or check pupils' understanding of texts read;
 - adapt work to support pupils of different abilities, such as providing sentence starters to support the written work of less able pupils, or provide more challenging texts and activities to extend more able pupils' reading skills;
 - provide opportunities for pupils to redraft their written work; or
 - focus on the accuracy of pupils' writing.
- 56 Inspectors scrutinised a sample of Year 9 pupils' work in English or Welsh, science and humanities subjects. In a minority of schools, teachers pay close attention to detailed marking of spelling and punctuation errors and provide pupils with detailed feedback on how to improve their written work. This includes identifying targets to improve literacy. In these schools, there is a wide variety of extended writing, with

tasks taking good account of learners' interests and the need to challenge groups of pupils, such as boys and more able learners. Pupils have good opportunities to redraft key assessments. Self-assessment sheets in science and history show that pupils respond well to teachers' comments and improve their work.

- 57 However, in a majority of schools, there are weaknesses in the marking of pupils' written work. Not enough subject teachers consistently highlight errors in written expression, spelling and punctuation and there are several examples where pupils continue to make the same mistakes in spelling, grammar and punctuation in pieces of work. Other shortcomings include giving pupils few opportunities to write at length or using too many worksheets or writing frames, which limit the quality and extent of more able pupils' writing. In a few subjects, tasks are not adapted for different abilities and this hinders their progress.
- 58 Pupils in a majority of schools display positive attitudes towards reading and are encouraged to read widely through library lessons. Pupils comment that many subjects use the library to support independent research tasks, as well as reading lessons organised by the English or Welsh department. A few schools encourage reading through reading awards schemes and other incentives for reading widely.

Tracking and organising intervention

- 59 Many schools have well-defined procedures for assessing pupils' reading abilities and arranging support for those with reading ages significantly below their actual (chronological) age. Schools use appropriate criteria to decide which pupils need literacy intervention, often in consultation with their local authority. Typically, schools provide suitable intervention programmes for pupils with standardised reading scores of below 85 (the mean is 100) or reading ages of 18 months or more below chronological age.
- 60 Common effective intervention strategies include using trained literacy support assistants and teachers with small groups of pupils or individuals withdrawn from lessons over a set number of weeks. Pupils' progress is tested at the end of the programme, with further support given to pupils who make limited progress. A majority of schools use the morning registration time to provide 'catch-up' reading support for individual learners. Many schools train sixth-form volunteers in 'buddy' reading programmes to help improve pupils' reading. A minority of schools use commercial software programmes for literacy intervention and appoint co-ordinators to lead this support. Often these co-ordinators are support assistants trained in using the programmes. However, a few of these programmes are not effective in improving pupils' reading or spelling skills, particularly if the programmes are not closely monitored.
- 61 Many literacy intervention programmes help pupils to improve their reading and spelling skills. Pupils find the reading demands of subjects easier to cope with after attending intervention programme and they have more confidence in attempting reading and writing tasks. However, in a few cases, subject teachers do not use the same resources or strategies in helping these pupils with their reading and spelling as pupils used in the intervention programmes. A few schools use learning coaches well to continue to support key stage 4 pupils who had received literacy support in key stage 3.

- 62 A few schools organise literacy activities for the whole Year 7 cohort. Regular reading lessons in the library for Year 7 pupils feature in a fifth of schools, where pupils read to either an adult or sixth-form pupil. A very few schools have recently introduced discrete skills lessons on a six-week rotation for Year 7 or have provided extra language lessons. Not all schools have evaluated the effectiveness of these discrete lessons in raising literacy standards.
- 63 More schools use computer-based programmes to track the reading and spelling age data of key stage 3 pupils in order to monitor their progress. Colour-coding individual reading ages is a useful way for schools to highlight groups of pupils for different levels of support. However, few schools monitor the progress of pupils with reading ages above their chronological age to ensure there are enough opportunities to develop their literacy skills further. Many schools re-test whole year groups throughout key stage 3 to track pupils' reading progress, although a few schools do not continue to test or monitor the progress of Year 9 pupils since their intervention programmes are focused on Year 7 and Year 8. This makes it difficult to know that all pupils achieve as well as they should or that support for those who continue to have weaknesses in literacy is provided between key stages. A few schools do not analyse the impact of intervention programmes on pupil outcomes.
- 64 Only a minority of schools record the percentage of pupils on intervention programmes who achieved level 5 at the end of key stage 3. In these schools, an average of 37% of these pupils go on to achieve level 5. However, in a few schools, up to 70% of pupils who received literacy intervention were successful in gaining level 5. In these schools, developing good literacy skills is a high priority in planning and self-evaluation at all levels.

Leadership and management in the surveyed schools

Leading and co-ordinating whole school approaches to literacy

- 65 All schools surveyed have literacy co-ordinators who are responsible for leading whole-school approaches. Many of them have a depth of experience in literacy and language as English or Welsh teachers. A minority of the co-ordinators are senior leaders or seconded to the senior leadership team. All schools give a senior leader responsibility for literacy at a strategic level. A minority of these co-ordinators are new to their role and it is too early to judge the impact of their leadership on improving standards.
- 66 There are networks of professional practice with a focus on literacy in all schools surveyed. A few schools are developing a progressive approach to improving literacy by training teachers in literacy strategies as part of a three-year plan. In these schools, working groups, in partnership with local authority advisers or independent consultants, have led whole-school training for staff on reading, writing and oracy within the past year. This training will be reviewed and evaluated termly, although at the time of writing these schools have not yet evaluated the success of the first term's literacy strategies.

Case study: Cyfarthfa High School, Merthyr Tydfil

Context

Cyfarthfa High School is an 11-18 English-medium secondary school in Merthyr Tydfil. Nineteen per cent of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. This figure is slightly higher than the national average of 17.7%.

Strategy

The local authority has worked with its secondary schools and external literacy adviser to create a cross-curricular **Merthyr Literacy Toolkit** to develop literacy skills over a three-year programme.

The toolkit consists of a range of strategies for reading, writing and oracy which are taught in lessons across the curriculum progressively. Each term has a specific focus on reading, writing and oracy and three strategies are developed in each year:

- Year 1: autumn term oracy – paired work; spring term reading for meaning; summer term purpose, audience and layout in writing
- Year 2: autumn term oracy – group work; spring term critical literacy (reading); summer term note-taking and preparing to write
- Year 3: autumn term oracy – presentation, role play and improvisation; spring term fluency and expression in reading; summer – writing frames

The toolkit provides resources and information on each strategy. Whole-school training is given on how to use the toolkit. Teachers are encouraged to use these strategies, particularly at key stage 3, and senior leaders have arranged monitoring and review activities to evaluate the impact of the strategies on pupils' literacy skills.

Outcomes

The strategy has provided greater awareness of the strategies and approaches relating to teaching literacy skills. As a result, schemes of work are more consistent and detailed in recording opportunities for teaching specific reading, writing and oracy skills. There is a clear focus on success criteria for teachers and pupils to have a common understanding of standards in oracy, reading and writing across the curriculum. The initiative is at an early stage of development but the toolkit has been shared with schools in a neighbouring local authority as a model of best practice. The 'bite size' approach to developing literacy strategies over a three-year period is helpful in training all teachers to use the strategies in planning lessons and assessments.

- 67 Most of the schools surveyed are developing networks of professional practice within their school. A few schools have made links with other schools in their family or their partner primary schools to share training opportunities and best practice in aspects of literacy, such as developing particular forms of writing or higher-order reading practice. Networks of professional practice in a minority of schools focus on improving writing skills while others are developing triple literacy projects to improve

consistency in literacy skills between English, Welsh and modern foreign language departments.

- 68 Most schools give teaching staff the reading ages of pupils and update their record systems regularly for recording information on pupils' reading progress. A few schools have given staff training on how to judge the readability of texts so that material can be pitched at the right level. However, a minority of schools do not evaluate how well teachers use reading age information in their planning and assessment of pupils' work.
- 69 A few of these schools have started to develop teachers' understanding of different written text forms by displaying posters or planning training days focused on developing text types or writing 'skeletons'. However, the majority of schools do not ensure that all staff teach the conventions of different kinds of writing used in their subject.
- 70 One school (Newtown High School) has regular 'Literacy Days' where the timetable is suspended for pupils to focus on improving aspects of spelling, grammar and punctuation. Both pupils and staff find this helpful.

Literacy priorities in school improvement

- 71 In a majority of school development plans, there are clear and measurable success criteria and plans have a focus on building the capacity of staff and leaders to support literacy improvements. A few schools have separate, detailed literacy development plans that show how specific initiatives and strategies are to be developed. However, in a few schools' development plans, improving literacy standards is not explicitly mentioned. A few schools' plans focus solely on basic skills improvements and not on developing whole-school literacy.
- 72 A minority of schools have used Estyn's strategy and guidance on inspecting literacy to inform self-evaluation and improvement planning. This includes using the guidance in adapting their lesson observation proforma to focus more specifically on literacy standards and in using the prompts for book scrutiny in their regular book reviews.
- 73 A minority of schools have a clear literacy focus in their monitoring and evaluation processes. In these schools, senior and middle leaders observe standards of literacy in lessons and teachers have a literacy target as one of their performance management objectives. In a few schools, literacy co-ordinators are also involved in observing lessons and scrutinising pupils' work as part of the review process. A majority of schools have reviewed their literacy policy and strategy, have new whole-school literacy initiatives and are beginning to develop more robust ways of evaluating the impact of the strategies. For a minority of schools, this is at an early stage of development.

Professional development for literacy

- 74 Schools have spent considerable resources in training for literacy. Much of this training has been for supporting individuals – such as the literacy co-ordinator – or for specific intervention programmes rather than whole-school training and development for most teaching staff to adapt their practice to include effective literacy strategies.
- 75 Many schools have responded well to the increased emphasis on skills in National Curriculum Subject Orders, and have recently prioritised whole-school training for literacy. In the past, many schools have focused training on specific aspects of literacy, often using Basic Skills Cymru funding for improving their literacy intervention programmes or developing common marking codes for assessment. Systematic, whole-school approaches to the teaching of reading, writing and oracy are more recent developments in secondary schools. Many schools have only started to train staff on using a variety of reading and writing strategies in planning lessons and assessments or have started to involve staff in networks of professional practice focused on improving whole-school literacy.
- 76 In a minority of schools, teachers know how to support the development of pupils' reading and writing skills. They have had training on text types or are beginning to develop understanding of higher-order reading strategies, using materials from published schemes, local authority support or Welsh Government guidance. However, in a majority of schools, teachers' ability to support and develop reading and writing skills in their subjects is too variable. Often this is because teachers in subjects other than English do not know enough about specific literacy strategies that would support skills development.
- 77 Many schools provide specific training for support staff to become skilled in delivering literacy intervention programmes. As a result, a few support staff take a leading role in managing or coordinating literacy support programmes. In a minority of schools, support staff join teaching staff for whole-school training on literacy or liaise with partner primary schools in researching commercially-produced reading or writing programmes.
- 78 A minority of schools have used the Welsh Government 'Guidance on the teaching of higher-order reading skills' and 'Guidance on the teaching of writing skills', published in 2010, which give in-service training opportunities. A few of these schools have used the guidance alongside their own resources or 'literacy toolkits' to provide extra literacy information for curriculum subjects. Other schools have used the guidance in twilight training sessions. A majority of schools are waiting for guidance to accompany the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework to support whole-school training in literacy.

Appendix 1 – Evidence base

Inspectors visited a representative sample of 21 secondary schools across Wales, inspected by Estyn between 2007 and 2009. Inspectors interviewed senior leaders and literacy co-ordinators and observed a Year 9 humanities or science lesson in each school. They also scrutinised the school development plan and sample schemes of work and pupils' books in English or Welsh, science and humanities subjects, and spoke to a group of Year 8 and Year 9 pupils. Science and humanities subjects were chosen as a focus since literacy skills, particularly higher-order reading and extended writing, occur naturally within these subjects.

The findings and recommendations in this report draw on:

- questionnaires completed by over 50 secondary schools;
- inspection evidence from secondary reports and end of key stage 3 data for the period 2009-2011; and
- a review of relevant literature included below.

The schools visited as part of this remit were:

- Abersychan Comprehensive School, Torfaen
- Corpus Christi Catholic High School, Cardiff
- Cwrt Sart Comprehensive School, Neath Port Talbot
- Cyfarthfa High School, Merthyr Tydfil
- Cymer Afan Comprehensive School, Neath Port Talbot
- Hawarden High School, Flintshire
- Llanidloes High school, Powys
- Llanishen High School, Cardiff
- Newtown High School, Powys
- Oakdale Comprehensive School, Caerphilly
- Pontypridd High School, Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Queen Elizabeth High School, Carmarthenshire
- Rhymney Comprehensive School, Caerphilly
- St Alban's Roman Catholic High School, Torfaen
- St Richard Gwyn Roman Catholic High School, Flintshire
- Tonypandy Community College, Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Tredegar Comprehensive School, Blaenau Gwent
- Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun, Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Ysgol Gyfun Tregib, Carmarthenshire
- Ysgol John Bright, Conwy
- Ysgol Uwchradd Aberteifi, Ceredigion

Literature reviewed:

Estyn publications

- HMCI Annual reports 2009-2010 and 2010-2011
- Innovation at key stage 3 (2010)

- Sharing good practice in developing pupils' literacy skills (2009)
- Best practice in the reading and writing of pupils aged seven to fourteen years (2008)
- Closing the gap between boys' and girls' attainment in schools (2008)

Other publications and research

- Setting the Baseline – The National Literacy Trust's first annual survey into young people's reading – 2010 (2011)
- PISA tests (2006, 2009)

Appendix 2 – Glossary/references

Functionally literate	A learner with a reading age above nine and a half years of age
Standardised scores	In reading tests, raw results are standardised to a mean of 100. They are useful to track progress as they take account of learners' ages.
Confidence level	This represents a period of time, typically six months either side of reading age scores to allow for differences in learners' performance.
Text types	Different types of writing. There are six main non-fiction text types: recount, instruction, non-chronological reports, explanation, persuasion and discussion. 'Guidance on the teaching of writing skills' (Welsh Government 2010) provides training activities for teachers focusing on the use of these across the curriculum.
Higher-order reading skills	The specific reading skills of location, reorganisation, inference, evaluation and appreciation of texts. 'Guidance on the teaching of higher-order reading skills' (Welsh Government 2010) provides training activities for teachers focusing on the use of these across the curriculum.

Appendix 3 – The remit author and survey team

Jackie Gapper HMI	Remit author
Stella Gruffydd AI	Team inspector
Steve Lamb HMI	Team inspector
Penny Lewis HMI	Team inspector