



# Estyn

*Rhagoriaeth i bawb - Excellence for all*

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg  
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
for Education and Training in Wales

## Best practice in the reading and writing of pupils aged 7 to 14 years

May 2008



BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL  
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



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- ▲ youth and community work training;
- ▲ LAs;
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- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

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<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The evidence base of the report</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Main findings</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Standards in Welsh and English in key stage 2 and key stage 3</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Curriculum planning</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>The quality of teaching and assessment</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Meeting the needs of pupils</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>School libraries and learning-resource centres</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Appendix 1 Cases studies which exemplify best practice in improving pupils' reading and writing skills in key stages 2 and 3</b>	
<b>Appendix 2 Questions for leaders and managers to use in reviewing and improving practice</b>	
<b>Appendix 3 Standards of achievement in Welsh and English</b>	



## Introduction

- 1 The purpose of this report is to provide advice in response to Estyn's annual Ministerial remit from the Welsh Assembly Government. The report provides an overview of standards and the quality of provision in Welsh and English as core National Curriculum subjects in primary and secondary schools in key stages 2 and 3. It evaluates practice in key areas of learning and teaching Welsh and English. Appendix 1 provides case studies of best practice in key areas.
- 2 The report also evaluates practice in developing reading and writing skills in subjects across the curriculum. Currently, there are a number of different terms that are used to describe these skills, including key and basic skills. The National Curriculum Orders for 2008 and the non-statutory Skills Framework for 3 to 19 year olds refer to reading and writing across the curriculum as communication skills. For the purposes of clarity and consistency, this report refers to communication skills in the same way.
- 3 While many schools have been successful in improving the standard of pupils' Welsh and English, the challenge is to spread best practice more widely and consistently so that the learning and teaching of reading and writing skills in all schools across Wales are as good as they can possibly be. The questions in Appendix 2 of this report are designed to help schools to review areas of their work in Welsh and English, in order to drive improvement further.
- 4 The report is intended mainly for staff in primary and secondary schools; teachers and learning support assistants who are involved in teaching reading and writing; senior managers in schools; and local education authority (LEA) advisers. The report may also be of interest to institutions that train teachers, church diocesan authorities, national bodies in Wales and others with an interest in education.

## Background

- 5 Reading and writing are at the heart of pupils' learning. These skills are vital to educational achievement. In key stage 2, schools need to build on the early reading and writing skills pupils develop in key stage 1. Extending reading and writing in key stage 3 is central to pupils' long term educational achievement and personal fulfilment. Success in reading and writing is critical to pupils' employment prospects and to the future of Wales as a learning country.
- 6 In September 2001, the Welsh Assembly Government published *The Learning Country* as a strategic programme for education in Wales up to 2010. *The Learning Country: Vision into Action* followed this report six years later. Together, these reports set out how the Welsh Assembly Government intends to ensure that children and young people succeed in education in Wales. They identify challenging targets for pupils in key stages 2 and 3 for 2010 as follows:
- 80% of 11 year olds to achieve the core subject indicator (CSI) (the expected level in Welsh or English, mathematics and science in combination); and
  - 65% of 14 year olds to achieve the CSI.
- 7 Good communication skills support all aspects of learning across the curriculum. In particular, these skills are of crucial relevance to:
- pupils who experience disadvantage; and
  - schools with pupil outcomes that are below the levels which might be expected of them<sup>1</sup>.
- 8 The report is also set in the context of improving transition between primary and secondary schools. In 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government published *Guidance on the preparation of key stage 2 to key stage 3 Transition Plans*. These plans have been in place since September 2007. The aim of the plans is to improve continuity in the delivery of the curriculum and better alignment of year 6 and year 7 classroom practice, including the teaching of literacy skills. This report reflects good practice in initiatives to improve transition.
- 9 In Wales, as in other parts of the UK and elsewhere, there are big differences in the achievements of boys and girls. In Welsh and English, this is evident from key stage 1 onwards. By the end of key stage 2, boys are around 10 percentage points behind girls in gaining the expected level in Welsh and English<sup>2</sup>. By the end of key stage 3, boys are around 16 percentage points behind girls in gaining the expected level in Welsh and English<sup>3</sup>. With the exception of Welsh in key stage 2, the gender gap is at its widest in writing.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Learning Country: Vision into Action* 2006 Welsh Assembly Government

<sup>2</sup> National Curriculum teacher assessment results 2007

<sup>3</sup> National Curriculum teacher assessment results 2007

- 10 As pupils progress from primary to secondary school, the need for good reading and writing skills increases. Boys' less well developed skills in these areas are recognised as one of the contributory factors that lead to the wider gap between the performance of boys and girls at this stage. Getting reading and writing right at the start of pupils' schooling and building effectively on this learning in key stages 2 and 3 is, therefore, vital to boys' long-term educational success.
- 11 This report builds on other Estyn publications, including:
- Aiming for Excellence in key stage 3, Estyn/ACCAC/WAG (2002, reprinted and reissued, 2004);
  - Bridging the Gap, Developing and using bridging units to support effective transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3, Estyn/ACCAC/WAG (2004);
  - Closing the gap between boys' and girls' attainment in schools, Estyn (2008);
  - Improving the learning and teaching of early reading skills, Estyn (2007);
  - Moving On...Effective Transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3, Estyn (2004);
  - Moving On...Improving Learning, Estyn, (2004);
  - Raising Standards in Literacy and Numeracy, Estyn/ACCAC/WAG (2003);
  - Raising standards of reading in Primary Schools A Discussion Paper Estyn (1999);
  - Raising standards of spelling in English in Primary Schools, A Discussion Paper Estyn (2001);
  - Raising standards of writing in Primary Schools, A Discussion Paper Estyn (2000); and
  - Transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3, Estyn, ACCAC, WAG (2004).

## **The evidence base of the report**

- 12 The findings and recommendations in this report draw on:
- an analysis of the inspection outcomes of primary and secondary schools inspected during 2004-2007;
  - an analysis of National Curriculum teacher assessment results in Welsh and English for primary and secondary schools;
  - observations of the teaching of literacy in 24 Welsh and English-medium primary and secondary schools;
  - information gained from interviews with staff in 24 Welsh and English-medium primary and secondary schools;
  - information gained from interviews with literacy advisers from six LEAs;
  - scrutiny of documentation provided by schools and LEAs; and
  - recent research and literature about the teaching of reading and writing in primary and secondary schools.



## Main findings

### Standards of reading and writing

- 13 Standards in Welsh as a first language and English in primary and secondary schools in Wales have improved since 2000. The greatest improvement has been in key stage 2, in both Welsh and English. However, the rate of improvement in all key stages has slowed since 2004. Standards in Welsh in key stages 2 and 3 were highest in 2003.
- 14 Over a number of years, pupils have attained higher standards in reading than writing in key stages 2 and 3. There is far less good and outstanding work in writing than in reading in both key stages. The gap between standards in reading and writing, evident in key stage 1, increases exponentially in key stages 2 and 3.
- 15 Girls attain higher standards than boys in Welsh and English and in other subjects in key stages 2 and 3. This situation is similar to other parts of the UK, Europe and elsewhere. Over the past 10 years, the gap between boys' and girls' performance has increased, with the widest gap in writing.
- 16 The content of the writing of many pupils of all abilities is often marred by inaccuracies in spelling, punctuation or grammar. A minority of primary schools and many secondary schools do not give enough consistent attention to accuracy in written work.

### Curriculum planning

- 17 Curriculum planning for teaching Welsh and English in key stages 2 and 3 has improved markedly since 2000 in many primary and secondary schools. Many schools have more detailed and coherent plans that focus on the knowledge, understanding and skills pupils should develop.
- 18 In a minority of schools, shortcomings in curriculum planning for Welsh and English inhibit the standards pupils achieve. Work is not stimulating or matched well enough to pupils' learning needs and does not take enough account of the skills pupils learn in each year group and stage. In a minority of Welsh-medium primary schools, planning does not take enough account of the particular learning needs of pupils who do not speak Welsh as a first language fluently.
- 19 Most schools give priority to literary texts, particularly fiction, at the expense of non-literary material, especially in the key stage 3 language curriculum.
- 20 An increasing minority of primary and secondary schools use the whole curriculum very effectively to make a systematic contribution to the development of pupils' communication skills. However, in around a third of schools, particularly secondary schools, work to develop pupils' communication skills across the curriculum remains underdeveloped. There are missed opportunities for developing pupils' communication skills during their study of other subjects.

## **Teaching and assessment**

- 21 The quality of teaching in Welsh and English has improved steadily over recent years. Many lessons include skilful teaching of reading and writing and staff encourage positive attitudes to language and literacy through their own enthusiasm for Welsh and English. Important shortcomings in teaching include a failure to take account of the inter-relationship of oral work, reading and writing and a lack of close attention to improving the quality and accuracy of pupils' writing.
- 22 The quality of assessment of reading and writing has improved year on year with many schools making use of a range of performance data to track pupils' progress. However, only a few schools set separate targets for reading and writing even when pupils are working at different levels in these aspects. Very few schools use assessment information to plan improvements in writing to the same extent as they use assessment information to improve reading.
- 23 The quality of marking in primary and secondary schools is improving overall. However, there is still too much poor marking that refers only to the degree of effort or identifies weaknesses without explaining how pupils can improve their work.

## **Meeting the needs of pupils**

- 24 Many schools are increasingly aware of groups of pupils who are not making the expected progress because they track pupils' progress more systematically and analyse data more fully than they used to. Many schools provide good support for pupils with special educational needs and English as an additional language to help them with their literacy skills. Arrangements to help these pupils improve their literacy skills are generally better in primary schools than secondary schools.
- 25 Only a few schools have been successful in narrowing the gap between boys' and girls' achievement. These schools have taken careful account of boys' needs and interests and ensured that learning and teaching are as good as they can be in line with the best practice identified in this report.
- 26 The majority of support programmes in primary and secondary schools help pupils to improve their reading and spelling. Some of the most successful intervention programmes are those funded and supported by Basic Skills Cymru, the Welsh Assembly Government or the local authority. Despite this support, less-able pupils, particularly boys, often make slow progress in their learning because of their poor literacy skills, particularly in writing. There are fewer support programmes to help pupils improve their writing skills, particularly at key stage 3. Many less able pupils in primary and secondary schools would benefit from more help with writing, particularly as they get older and writing tasks become more complex.
- 27 While more and more schools are recognising the need to improve provision for more-able and talented pupils, only a small minority of schools provide these pupils with reading and writing tasks that stretch and challenge them. A few schools make very good additional arrangements for more-able and talented pupils in order to provide more stimulation and motivation for them to achieve excellence.

## **Transition**

- 28 Over recent years, most schools have improved their transition arrangements to enable pupils to move more smoothly from one phase of education to another. However, only a minority of schools plan common schemes of work in Welsh and English for pupils from the age of 7-14, to make sure teaching is always pitched at the right level and work is progressive and challenging. In many schools, information about pupils' prior achievements and learning needs in reading and writing does not inform teaching.
- 29 Across many secondary schools, there are still false assumptions about pupils' competence and independence as readers and writers by the time they move to secondary schools. In a small minority of secondary schools, there is too much testing of pupils in Year 7 to find out information that usually already exists in their previous school.

## **Leadership and management**

- 30 The quality of leadership and management has improved over recent years in many primary and secondary schools and this has generated improvements in literacy. Almost all schools have focused more on improving standards of pupils' reading but have given less attention to improving writing. Literacy strategies have not had as much impact on standards in many secondary schools as they have had in most primary schools.
- 31 Most local education authorities provide good support for schools on reading that builds on the development of early reading skills. There is often less support for writing, particularly in key stage 3 and when pupils transfer from primary to secondary school. Too few authorities analyse specific data for reading and writing, and in sufficient detail, to identify schools most in need of improvement in key aspects of literacy and groups of pupils most at risk of underachievement, including pupils in pupil referral units and some ethnic minority learners.

## Recommendations

### Schools should:

- R1 Consult Appendix 2 and use it to review and improve practice in learning and teaching reading and writing.
- R2 Continue to raise standards in English and Welsh, particularly at key stage 3, by:
- setting clear strategies that improve pupils' literacy skills;
  - giving more attention to improving pupils' writing; and
  - focusing support on the groups of pupils and individuals who make least progress in developing their reading or writing skills.
- R3 Improve curriculum planning to ensure that:
- there is balance in the range of literary and non-literary texts that pupils read and write; and
  - teaching across the whole curriculum develops pupils' reading and writing skills more effectively.
- R4 Further improve teaching and assessment by:
- giving close attention to content, expression and accuracy in reading and writing;
  - ensuring that marking, including pupils' own assessments, uses criteria so that pupils know how well they are doing and what they should do to improve their work; and
  - setting separate targets for pupils to achieve in reading and writing and tracking pupils' progress towards reaching them.
- R5 Meet the needs of all pupils by:
- intervening as early as possible to help pupils who have problems with reading or writing;
  - using the most effective teaching strategies to engage all pupils but particularly boys; and
  - ensuring that more-able and talented pupils have challenging written tasks and read widely and ambitiously.

R6 Continue to improve transition between key stages 2 and 3 by:

- planning schemes of work in English and Welsh that provide progression across key stages 2 and 3;
- making better use of information about pupils' achievements when they transfer to the secondary phase; and
- ensuring that work at key stage 3 takes account of first-hand evidence of pupils' standards of reading and writing in Year 6.

R7 Give reading and writing a high priority by:

- giving a senior manager designated responsibility for improving standards of literacy;
- having a well-developed strategy to develop literacy skills throughout the school, (this is a priority for key stage 3 in particular);
- targeting initiatives for improvement on the weaker aspects of literacy evident within the school; and
- reviewing provision and standards of literacy regularly in line with the best practice identified in this report.

**Local education authorities should:**

R8 have a well developed whole-authority literacy strategy that identifies, explicitly, action to improve standards of reading and writing at key stages 2 and 3, and includes a focus on the issues raised in recommendations already noted above.

**Providers of initial teacher education and training should:**

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

**The Welsh Assembly Government should:**

R10 collect and publish data on standards of pupils' oracy, reading and writing in key stage 3 to enable progress to be monitored;

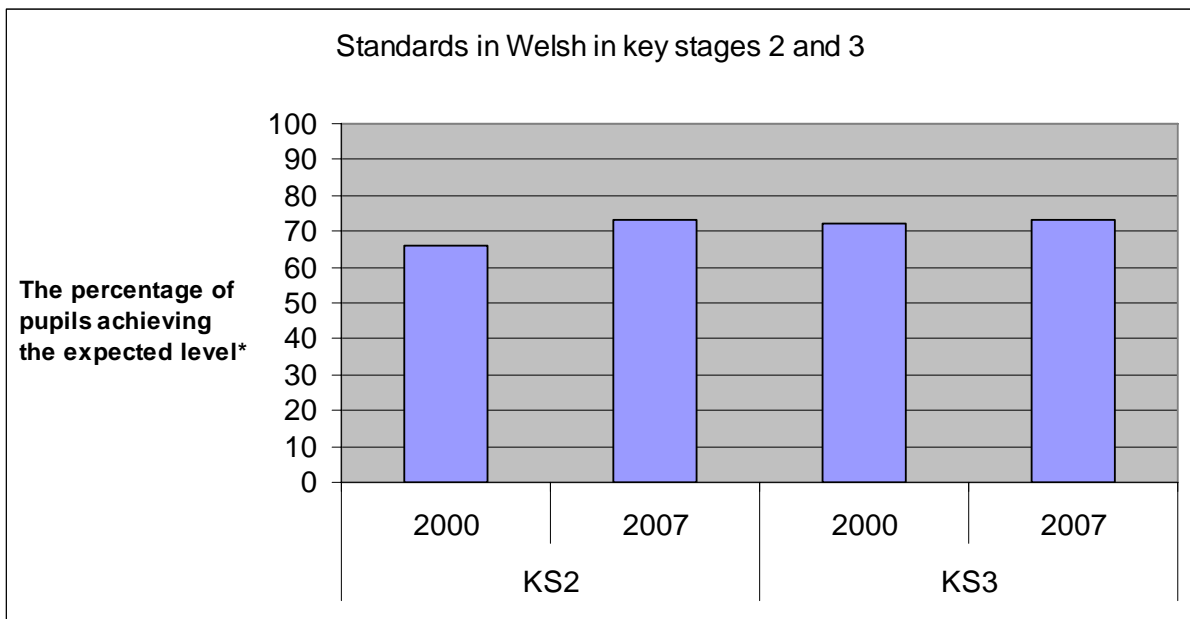
R11 continue to make resources available in the Better Schools Fund for local authorities working with schools to improve reading and writing skills, with a particular focus on writing and key stage 3; and

R12 commission detailed guidance on good practice in the teaching of writing.

## Standards in Welsh and English in key stage 2 and key stage 3

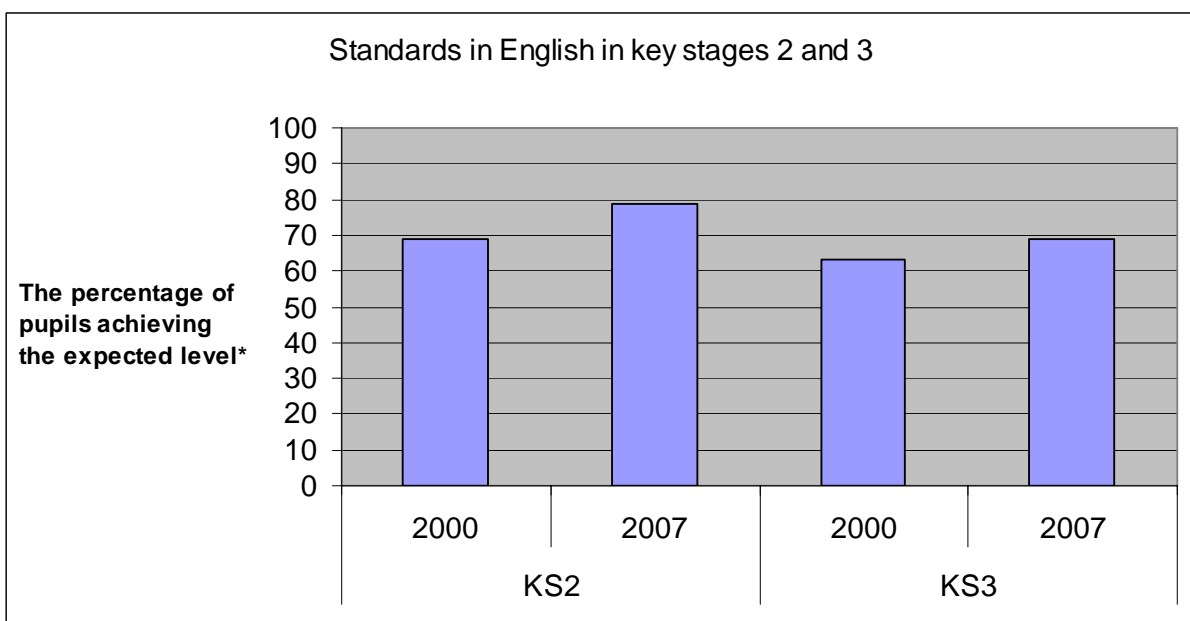
- 32 Since 2000, National Curriculum results and inspection evidence show that standards of Welsh and English in primary and secondary schools in Wales have risen overall. The greatest improvement has been in key stage 2, where standards have improved by around 10 percentage points during this time. Tables 1 and 2 below show the standards pupils achieved in Welsh and English in 2000 compared with 2007.

**Table 1: Standards in Welsh in key stages 2 and 3**



\* The expected level for key stage 2 is level 4 and for key stage 3 is level 5

**Table 2: Standards in English in key stages 2 and 3**



\* The expected level for key stage 2 is level 4 and for key stage 3 is level 5

33 However, despite these improvements, the rate of progress in both key stages has slowed since 2004. In addition, in 2007, standards in Welsh in key stages 2 and 3 were behind levels attained in 2003. Further information about pupils' performance since 2000 is contained in Appendix 3.

**Standards in key stage 2**

34 When pupils enter key stage 2, most will have achieved higher standards in oracy in Welsh and English than in reading or writing. This is because learning to read and write is dependent upon pupils' spoken language skills. Usually, pupils develop reading skills sooner and faster than their writing skills.

35 By the end of key stage 2, the standards of pupils' oracy and reading achievements are broadly similar in both Welsh and English. However, despite pupils' greater maturity in developing their writing skills during this key stage, the difference between standards of pupils' reading and writing in both Welsh and English increases. Pupils' standards of writing are around ten percentage points lower in Welsh and five percentage points lower in English.

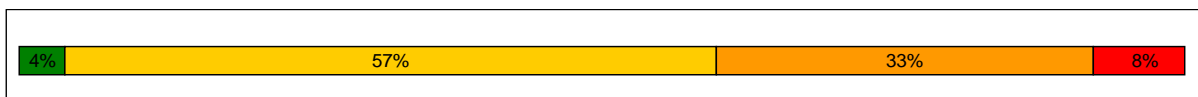
**Standards in communication skills in key stages 1 and 2**

36 Inspection evidence in tables 3 and 4 below, show that pupils achieve lower standards in writing than reading in Welsh and English in primary schools. This is a very similar picture to National Curriculum assessment results.

**Table 3: Standards of communication skills in Welsh in primary schools in 2006-2007\***

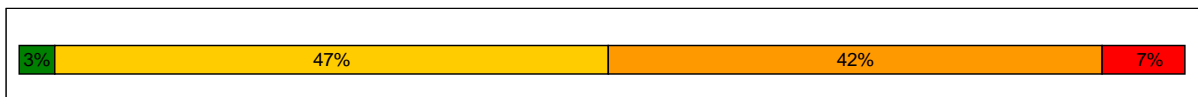
**Reading**

Grade 1: 4%	Grade 2: 57%	Grade 3: 33%	Grades 4 and 5: 8%
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**Writing**

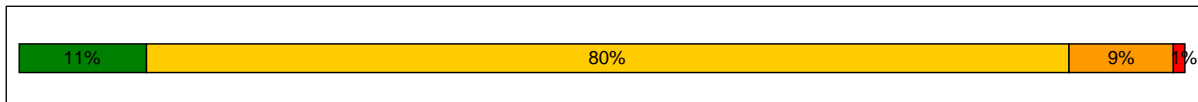
Grade 1: 3%	Grade 2: 47%	Grade 3: 42%	Grades 4 and 5: 7%
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**Table 4: Standards of communication skills in English in primary schools in 2006-2007\***

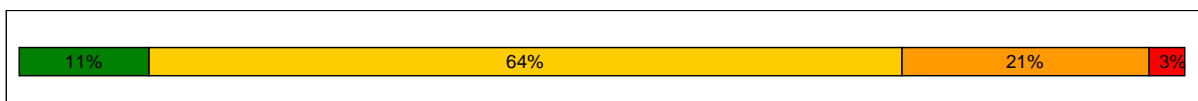
**Reading**

Grade 1: 11%	Grade 2: 80%	Grade 3: 9%	Grades 4 and 5: 1%
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**Writing**

Grade 1: 11%	Grade 2: 64%	Grade 3: 21%	Grades 4 and 5: 3%
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\* Where percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number, they may not add up to 100.

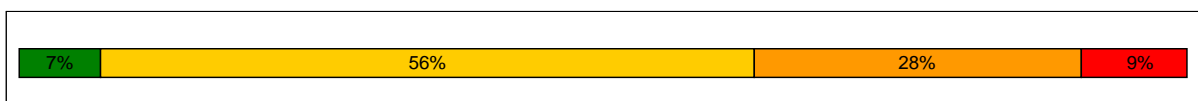
**Standards in key stage 3**

- 37 An analysis of standards in separate National Curriculum levels for reading and writing is not possible at key stage 3 because data is published at subject level rather than by attainment target. However, inspection evidence shown in tables 5 and 6 below, show that pupils continue to do less well in writing than in reading in Welsh and English at this stage. There is less good and outstanding work in writing than in reading.

**Table 5: Standards of communication skills in Welsh in secondary schools in 2006-2007\***

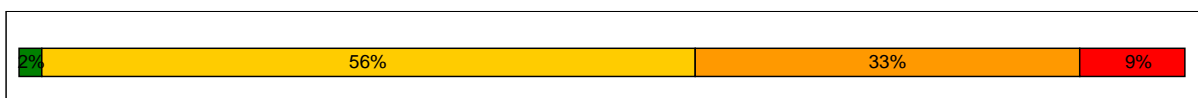
**Reading**

Grade 1: 7%	Grade 2: 56%	Grade 3: 28%	Grades 4 and 5: 9%
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**Writing**

Grade 1: 2%	Grade 2: 56%	Grade 3: 33%	Grades 4 and 5: 9%
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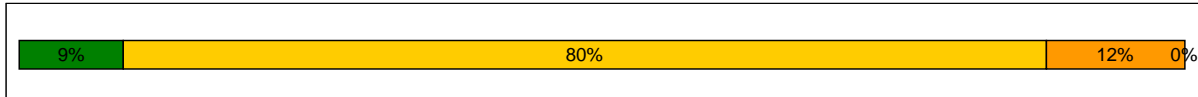




**Table 6: Standards of communication skills in English in secondary schools in 2006-2007\***

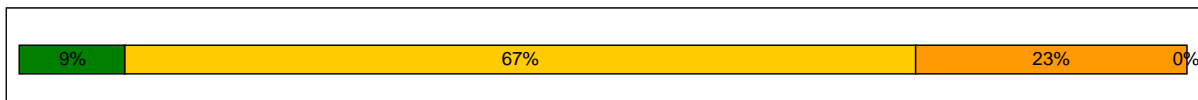
**Reading**

Grade 1: 9%	Grade 2: 80%	Grade 3: 12%	Grades 4 and 5: 0%
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**Writing**

Grade 1: 9%	Grade 2: 67%	Grade 3: 23%	Grades 4 and 5: 0%
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\* Where percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number, they may not add up to 100.

**The performance of boys and girls**

- 38 Over a number of years, National Curriculum assessment results show big differences in the achievements of boys and girls in Welsh and English in key stages 2 and 3. Information about the attainment of boys and girls since 2000 is shown in Appendix 3. Boys also continue to achieve less well than girls in almost all subjects in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations in key stage 4.
- 39 Over recent years, work to close the gap in all key stages has improved boys' performance overall but the difference between the standards girls and boys achieve has remained the same. This is because girls have also benefited from the measures schools have taken to improve boys' performance. Overall, the performance of boys has remained around 10 percentage points behind girls in standards of Welsh and English in key stage 2 over this time. There is a wider gap in key stage 3 where boys are around 16 percentage points behind girls. Estyn's report 'Closing the gap between boys' and girls' attainment in schools' (2008) refers in more detail to the issues involved.

## Curriculum planning

- 40 Over the past 10 years, the quality of curriculum planning for teaching Welsh and English in key stages 2 and 3 has improved in most primary and secondary schools. Local authorities have produced useful guidance materials. Government initiatives to improve literacy and the use of a range of commercial resources have helped staff to pay close attention to the knowledge, understanding and skills that pupils should acquire.
- 41 The greatest improvements in curriculum planning have been in:
- the more detailed, coherent plans that meet the requirements of the National Curriculum;
  - clearer teaching objectives and more explicit learning outcomes for pupils at text, sentence and word levels; and
  - increasing challenge in reading and writing tasks so that pupils are able to develop and refine their literacy skills.
- 42 Some of these aspects are illustrated in case studies 1 and 2 in Appendix 1.
- 43 Most schools give greater priority to reading and responding to literary texts, particularly fiction, and do not give enough attention to the skills of reading and writing non-literary material. This shortcoming in planning and provision is particularly marked in secondary schools.
- 44 In a small minority of primary and secondary schools, there are shortcomings in curriculum planning for Welsh and English. These shortcomings include:
- unclear teaching intentions and work that is repetitive and uninteresting so that pupils are not engaged enough to help them to attain high standards;
  - not enough account taken of the literacy skills pupils learn in each year group and stage, which hinders progression in their learning;
  - work that is not matched well enough to pupils' learning needs; and
  - a lack of attention to poetry as a literary form so that few poems and writing about poetry are covered each year.
- 45 In a minority of Welsh-medium primary schools, planning does not take enough account of the particular learning needs of pupils who do not speak Welsh as a first language fluently.
- 46 The communication skills of reading and writing develop most successfully in primary and secondary schools when pupils develop and use them as part of learning in all areas of the curriculum. Over recent years, most schools have amended their

subject plans to show how communication and other skills<sup>4</sup> will be used in work across the curriculum. In a minority of secondary schools, specialist teachers of subjects other than Welsh and English use a skills framework and the criteria for skills qualifications to help pupils develop reading and writing skills relevant to the subject, they study. This systematic approach helps pupils to develop their communication skills to higher standards because they are practising them in a range of contexts.

- 47 In the best practice, planning for the development of communication skills in subjects across the curriculum:
- is guided by a whole school policy that ensures coherence and consistency and makes the development of communication skills the responsibility of all staff;
  - is strongly embedded in all schemes of work and lesson plans; and
  - takes account of the different abilities and progress of pupils so that there is the right level of support, challenge and progression in their learning.
- 48 Case studies 3 and 4 in Appendix 1 provide examples of outstanding practice in developing pupils' communication skills across the curriculum.
- 49 Despite improvements to subject planning to include the use of communication skills, this is still an area for development in around a third of schools, most particularly in secondary schools. There are missed opportunities for developing pupils' communication skills during their study of other subjects. This is because subject plans are not specific enough about the reading and writing skills pupils need to use. They do not take enough account of how pupils' communication skills will be developed in a progressive and systematic way, building on and complementing the skills that pupils gain in Welsh and English lessons.
- 50 Shortcomings in developing communication skills across the curriculum include:
- not enough agreement or commitment to plan and take responsibility for teaching reading and writing skills at a whole-school level;
  - planning that does not identify the specific reading and writing skills to be developed in work in other subjects;
  - reading and writing demands that do not take enough account of pupils' existing skills and are not adapted enough to suit pupils' learning needs;
  - lack of links with pupils' individual reading programmes, such as guiding them to a biography relevant to the period studied in history; and
  - in secondary schools, the perception that communication skills are the sole responsibility of Welsh and English teachers.

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<sup>4</sup> These other skills include information and communications technology (ICT), number, Curriculum Cymreig and personal and social education

## The quality of teaching and assessment

### The quality of teaching

- 51 The quality of teaching in Welsh and English has improved steadily over the past 10 years. Many lessons are delivered at a good pace and include skilful teaching of reading and writing. Good teaching and enthusiasm for language and literature in Welsh and English foster positive attitudes to language and literature.
- 52 In the most effective lessons, staff link speaking and listening, reading and writing so that pupils understand that these language modes are interdependent. Through listening and reading, pupils understand how language conveys meaning and they develop these skills for themselves orally and in writing. When staff develop these skills through interesting and challenging topics, pupils are motivated to become independent readers and willing communicators.
- 53 In the best teaching, language skills are taught explicitly. The teacher demonstrates and explains specific skills so that pupils understand clearly and can apply what they have learnt for themselves. Reading and writing tasks are pitched at the right level and structured in a way that enables pupils to build on what they can already do and develop their skills further.
- 54 When there is a continuing focus on phonics in key stage 2, particularly in English, this approach helps pupils to consolidate and use this knowledge to decode words effectively. Effective work includes:
- revising and consolidating the blending of phonemes;
  - identifying syllabic patterns in multi-syllabic words; and
  - continuing to emphasise the use of phonic knowledge as one of the strategies for reading unfamiliar words.
- 55 Securing pupils' phonic knowledge of language is important for decoding – reading a range of texts accurately and independently – and for encoding – spelling words correctly.
- 56 In both key stages, pupils develop higher-order reading skills best through reading a range of fiction and non-fiction texts that are written for different purposes and audiences. Pupils achieve high standards in reading when staff use interesting texts to encourage pupils' personal response and to extend their understanding. In the most effective teaching, staff use a range of approaches, including shared, group and guided reading to improve pupil's fluency and comprehension skills.
- 57 Pupils' reading skills develop best when staff choose high-quality texts. This is because the quality of pupils' own language is usually directly related to the quality of what they read and hear. Texts also include a range of media, such as videos, audio tapes and specialist magazines that challenge the assumption that reading is concerned only with books.

- 58 In the best practice, staff:
- help pupils to become discerning readers, able to make judgements about the meaning, accuracy and quality of what they read;
  - encourage pupils to read widely for pleasure and develop leisure reading habits that are essential for life;
  - enable pupils to read in different ways for different purposes, such as scanning for headings and key words, predicting a character's reactions to events in a narrative and considering alternative interpretations of information;
  - help pupils acquire a range of information retrieval strategies, such as using indexes and ICT systems; and
  - make good use of initiatives, such as 'Shadowing the Carnegie Medal' and Basic Skills Cymru's 'Read a Million Words' to motivate pupils to read.
- 59 Pupils write best when writing is relevant to their needs and interests. This is when they write for real purposes and audiences, for example, articles for magazines, pamphlets or posters on topical issues, oral presentations, reviews for the book club and stories, poems and drama scripts which are shared with others.
- 60 The best writing is stimulated by discussion or a practical activity such as drama, role-play or improvisation which extends pupils' thinking so that they have plenty of ideas for their writing. Good writing by pupils is usually a result of a powerful stimulus, such as a novel or short story, a play or poetry or a non-literary stimulus such as an informative pamphlet or an article in a newspaper or a thought-provoking film or television programme.
- 61 Effective teaching of different kinds of writing includes an explanation of the features of different types of text and the techniques that writers use to create particular effects. Staff and pupils work together on a piece of writing that models the skills that pupils need to use for themselves. Pupils learn about features of different texts at whole text, sentence and word level. They learn how to set out a piece of writing and organise their ideas, construct sentences in different ways and choose the best vocabulary. Gradually, pupils learn how to use specific techniques such as alliteration, imagery, rhythm and rhetoric to convey meaning.
- 62 Standards of writing are usually highest where writing is taught as a process of composition that includes revising, editing and sharing drafts with others. As a result pupils learn ways to improve the content, expression and accuracy of their work. They learn good writing habits that they then apply independently.
- 63 Accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar are essential to communicate meaning clearly to a reader. Research shows that most learners think that spelling, punctuation and grammar are the hardest aspects of learning to write. Schools that have improved the accuracy of pupils' writing have clear guidance on the teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar that all staff use consistently. In schools where pupils' writing skills are good or better, staff understand that pupils have to be taught the skills of spelling, punctuation and grammar explicitly.

- 64 Spelling improves when pupils:
- have a good phonic understanding and sound out words so that they can hear them before they spell them;
  - learn and understand word families and regular spelling patterns;
  - learn the spellings of commonly used words that sound similar but are spelt differently; and
  - are taught strategies to learn irregular spellings including 'look, say, cover, write, check'.
- 65 Schools that have given a high priority to improving spelling have strategies to help pupils check rather than guess spellings they do not know. In these schools, staff provide dictionaries and thesauruses for pupils to look up spellings and the meaning of words, teach pupils specialist vocabulary and subject terminology, display key words prominently in classrooms and teach pupils to revise and edit their work.
- 66 The content of the writing of many pupils of all abilities is often marred by inaccuracies in spelling, punctuation or grammar. Pupils who have difficulty with these skills struggle to write competently as writing tasks become more complex. Often, these pupils lose confidence as writers and make less progress in writing than in speaking, listening and reading. A minority of primary schools and many secondary schools do not give consistent attention to accuracy in written work.
- 67 In Welsh-medium schools, pupils often have difficulties with spelling in English, particularly in Years 3 and 4, because spelling patterns in English are not as phonetically consistent as in Welsh. In the best practice, Welsh-medium primary schools give particular attention to helping pupils to learn to spell in English throughout key stage 2 and secondary schools continue to provide help where it is needed so that pupils learn to spell accurately in both languages.
- 68 Punctuation is taught best when the teacher demonstrates clearly how and why punctuation is used. This is often done effectively through shared reading and writing and then reinforced through additional support for individual pupils. Primary school staff generally give more regular attention to punctuation than secondary school staff. In English and Welsh lessons and in special educational needs departments in secondary schools, punctuation is usually well taught but punctuation skills are not given the same attention in other subjects. As a result, some secondary school pupils do not think punctuation is important.
- 69 Many pupils develop an understanding of grammar through their reading. The most common mistakes relate to subject and verb agreement, tenses and the construction of complex sentences. When staff explain grammatical conventions clearly, this helps pupils understand the errors in their work. However, there is little consistent practice in teaching grammar. A few secondary schools provide very clear guidance to pupils, often developed with the modern foreign languages department, so that all staff use the same terminology to talk about grammar. In these schools, pupils have a good understanding of grammar in Welsh and English.

- 70 Many pupils who make mistakes in written work do so because of uncertainty or carelessness. Many pupils can self-correct errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar quickly when they are alerted to a mistake. In the best practice, pupils edit their work as normal practice. They develop the editing habit by reading each other's work and helping each other. Some schools have effective spelling 'buddy' systems that have made pupils more careful writers. Effective staff pick up errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar and deal with them in class or with individuals at regular intervals. Schools that have well planned intervention programmes provide good additional support for pupils who have particular difficulties with accuracy in writing.

### **Assessing reading and writing**

- 71 The way that staff assess reading and writing has improved steadily over recent years. Almost all schools use assessment data to track pupils' progress through National Curriculum levels in English and Welsh. Judging pupils' performance consistently against the characteristics of progression is particularly important in planning the next stage of learning.
- 72 All schools set target levels for pupils to achieve by the end of key stages 2 and 3. However, few schools set separate targets for reading and writing although pupils are often working at different levels in these aspects. Many schools also set short term targets for pupils in specific aspects of Welsh or English. A majority of these schools review pupils' progress towards achieving their target levels at regular intervals. In the best practice, they use this information well to provide timely additional support for pupils who do not make progress in line with expectations and make it more likely that these pupils will reach their expected level.
- 73 Many schools are aware that pupils' writing is not as good as their reading. Sometimes there are good reasons for this. For example, pupils with English or Welsh as an additional language often make faster progress in reading and their writing develops more fully at a later stage. However, very few schools use assessment evidence to plan improvements in writing to the same extent as they plan to improve reading. In most school and subject improvement plans, reading receives a lot more attention than writing, even where there is evidence that standards in writing, particularly among less able pupils, need to improve.
- 74 In the best practice in assessing reading and writing:
- assessment criteria are an integral part of planning, teaching, and marking;
  - there is a whole-school policy for marking writing that staff follow consistently and that pupils understand;
  - pupils know the objectives of activities and tasks and understand what they are learning in lessons;
  - oral and written feedback refers specifically to what pupils have achieved and what aspects of work they need to improve; and

- staff and pupils track progress and plan for improvement in the short and longer term.

- 75 In the effective assessment of reading, staff judge pupils' progress in terms of fluency, understanding and range of reading. When listening to pupils read, staff note significant features of pupils' performance, such as words that they have difficulty with and their likes and dislikes and they use this information to help pupils make progress. They monitor the range of pupils' independent reading, for example, through regular scrutiny of pupils' reading journals, and give feedback and guidance to develop and extend their reading preferences and interests.
- 76 In the effective assessment of writing, pupils' work is read and marked according to the learning objectives shared with pupils. Staff make comments on pupils' work that identifies strengths and areas to improve and provide guidance where there are specific errors, such as how to use paragraphs to organise work.
- 77 The quality of marking is improving overall but there is still too much poor marking that refers only to the efforts that pupils make or identifies weaknesses, without explanation, for example, 'well done' or 'you can do better than this' or 'this is too short'. Marking that advises without giving guidance on how to improve is demoralising and comments such as 'watch your punctuation' or 'use paragraphs' do not help pupils to understand the function of punctuation or how to structure their work. This kind of marking reinforces failure and is often a waste of teachers' time.

### **Peer and self-assessment**

- 78 Increasingly, in many schools, pupils are learning to assess their own work and that of others. This practice makes pupils much better learners because they understand what they can do well and the aspects of their work that they need to improve. In many schools, pupils are making faster progress because they can assess their own and others' work. Case studies 5 and 6 show how successful schools have encouraged pupils to assess their own work.
- 79 Peer and self-assessment is most effective when staff give pupils clear 'success criteria'. Information, such as matrices that show features of reading and writing at different levels of achievement helps pupils to determine for themselves where they are on a progressive continuum of development and what they have to learn next. A few schools have developed particularly useful matrices for different kinds of writing that identify the specific features and techniques required for different kinds of writing, for example, newspaper articles, short stories or formal speeches.



## Meeting the needs of pupils

- 80 In many schools, staff are increasingly more aware of groups of pupils who are not making the expected progress because they track pupils' progress more systematically and analyse data more fully than 10 years ago. In a minority of schools, staff are beginning to use this information to find out the reasons for underachievement, for example, the poor writing skills of less able pupils or a lack of challenging texts and tasks for able pupils.

### Tackling the underachievement of boys

- 81 In Wales, in key stages 2 and 3, girls attain higher standards than boys in Welsh and English and in almost all other subjects. Over the past five years, the gap between boys' and girls' performance in English and Welsh has widened. The gap between boys' and girls' achievement is widest in writing.
- 82 More boys than girls have trouble learning Welsh and English. These difficulties can affect pupils' access to learning and limit their performance across all areas of the curriculum. By the age of 14, a significant minority of boys cannot keep pace with much of the work at school and they experience an increasing sense of frustration and failure. Boys with poor literacy skills are much more likely to be excluded from school than their peers. At the same time, boys with very high ability often do not do as well as they could.
- 83 Research and inspection evidence show that the underachievement of boys is a complex issue that cannot only be ascribed to gender. Estyn's report on 'Closing the gap between boys' and girls' attainment in schools' (2008) recognises that gender is only one of a number of significant factors that influence the extent to which pupils realise their potential.
- 84 Assertions such as 'Many boys prefer non-fiction' or 'Boys do not like reading or writing stories' or 'Boys are more heavily influenced by their peer groups than girls' often have some basis in fact but they are not always helpful. Boys' underachievement is a complex issue because there are many interlinking factors. These factors include cultural, social and emotional aspects that affect pupil preferences and influence staff perceptions as well as pupils' behaviour. In the debate about boys' underachievement, it is important to remember that many boys do very well in Welsh and English and develop communication skills of a high order. Also, of course, not all girls are doing better than their male peers. There are also some groups of girls, often in socially and economically deprived areas, who do not achieve as well as they could.
- 85 An analysis of the performance of boys and girls in gaining the core subject indicator (CSI) in key stages 2 and 3 prior to 2005 indicates that teachers generally assessed boys' achievement below their attainment in National Curriculum (NC) tests. Generally, schools assessed girls' achievement in line with their attainment in NC tests. Similar analyses cannot be undertaken for results after 2005 due to the

demise of NC tests for pupils in both key stages<sup>5</sup>. Any conclusion from these results must avoid simplistic interpretations of gender identity and male achievement. However, research shows that perceptions of boys' performance can be affected by:

- a lack of balanced view of the full range of boys' literacy skills, including oracy, reading and writing;
- a lack of boys' credibility for success due to the associations between literacy and the female identity; and
- more emphasis on accuracy and presentation of writing, which diminishes the value of the content of the writing.

86 Research and inspection evidence also show that boys are much more likely to be disadvantaged than girls by mediocre or weak teaching of Welsh and English. Often, while girls will continue to perform relatively well in these circumstances, boys are disproportionately affected in their attitude to learning and in their performance. In other words, boys appear to disengage more quickly than girls when they encounter mediocre teaching.

87 In the small number of schools across Wales where there is little difference between girls and boys' achievements in reading and writing, standards have improved because staff have focused on which boys and which girls are underachieving. Staff use research findings wisely, to inform their teaching approaches so that they do not over-simplify boy/girl issues or generalise inappropriately about boys' preferred learning styles. While their whole school policies focus on raising boys' attainment, a positive learning ethos values all pupils equally and there are high expectations of both boys and girls.

88 The characteristics of lessons that research and inspection evidence show to be most effective for boys, include:

- very well planned lessons with clear achievable aims that are shared with pupils;
- oral work preceding reading and writing so that pupils use talk to rehearse their work, which helps them to be better prepared for tasks;
- a variety of stimulating activities using literary and non-literary materials, which appeal to boys' interests;
- structured and purposeful reading and writing tasks that are explained clearly;
- the use of the motivating effect of technology to encourage communication, reading and research;
- close monitoring of pupils' work with specific support for those who need help with organising their work;

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<sup>5</sup> The NC tasks and tests were abolished in 2004 in key stage 2 and in 2005 in key stage 3.

- attention to the seating and grouping arrangements to bring maximum benefits to boys and girls' learning; and
  - positive strategies that build pupils' self-esteem and reward effort and good work.
- 89 Other teaching approaches that are successful with boys and girls, include using role-play, drama and collaborative group work so that learning is interesting and exciting. Careful selection and use of materials such as fiction and non-fiction, media and moving image texts, are important in engaging pupils' interest and in challenging perceptions of gender stereotypes. The use of resources, such as writing frames and templates also helps to support pupils' learning effectively. Case study 7 in Appendix 1 provides an example of how a primary school raised the level of boys' achievements by giving attention to these aspects.
- 90 In the best practice, staff use a wide range of assessment information and performance data skilfully to target support where it is most needed. All pupils receive detailed feedback about their work, which is particularly motivating for boys. In these schools, there is a keen emphasis on pupils checking their own work for accuracy and improved expression, matching their achievements to clear criteria. Peer and self-assessment are used as important tools to help pupils understand what they need to do to improve and make progress. In addition, peer mentoring and paired reading programmes with older pupils are particularly successful in helping boys to make progress.
- 91 In these ways, staff help pupils to gain confidence and be successful in Welsh and English. This is particularly important for boys as they need to see themselves as readers and writers.

### **Meeting the needs of less-able pupils**

- 92 Overall, most schools are meeting the needs of less-able pupils better than previously. There is usually particularly good support for pupils with special educational needs and most individual educational plans (IEPs) identify the reading and writing skills pupils need to acquire and the steps they need to take to achieve these goals. The most successful schools know which pupils are not making enough progress in reading and writing and intervene to provide support as early as possible to help them to keep up with their peers. Case studies 8, 9 and 10 in Appendix 1 show how staff in primary and secondary schools have improved support for less-able pupils.
- 93 Over recent years, some of the most successful intervention programmes, many of them funded and supported by Basic Skills Cymru, the Welsh Assembly Government or the local authority, are:
- reading recovery programmes in primary schools that help pupils develop reading and writing skills;
  - catch-up reading programmes;
  - short literacy-acceleration courses;

- paired spelling programmes to tackle specific difficulties;
- paired reading schemes with trained sixth formers for both poor and reluctant readers; and
- individual and group programmes provided by learning support assistants.

- 94 Most support programmes in primary and secondary schools help pupils to improve their reading and spelling. There are fewer support programmes to help pupils to improve their wider writing skills. This is an important shortcoming. Many less able pupils need more help with writing, particularly as they get older and writing tasks become more complex. Less-able pupils, particularly boys, can become demoralised because of errors in written work that they do not know how to correct.
- 95 In a minority of secondary schools, there is still a false assumption by many staff that all pupils are competent and independent readers and writers by the time they move to this phase of education.

### **Meeting the needs of more-able and talented pupils**

- 96 Increasingly, more schools are looking to make better provision for more able and talented pupils. However, only a small minority of schools provide more-able and talented pupils with reading and writing tasks that stretch and challenge them. A few schools make very good additional arrangements for more-able and talented pupils in order to provide more stimulation and motivation for them to achieve excellence. These arrangements often include specialist groups that meet on a regular basis to provide pupils with opportunities to challenge and extend their literacy skills. Case studies 11 and 12 in Appendix 1 provide examples of how more-able and talented pupils have benefited from this specialist provision.
- 97 In the best practice, staff:
- make certain that more-able and talented pupils read ambitiously and widely;
  - routinely set demanding written tasks that encourage research and original work from the most able pupils; and
  - make certain that more-able pupils in Year 7 are challenged enough so that they make progress in line with their ability.

### **Meeting the needs of pupils for whom English is an additional language**

- 98 In recent years, Wales has become increasingly diverse with a very high number of people coming from the European Union and elsewhere to live and work in Wales. As a result, the number of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) has increased sharply in a significant number of schools over recent years. Many local education authorities provide mainstream staff with well-planned advice and training to help them to meet the needs of a rapidly increasing number of pupils with EAL. This support has helped pupils to receive specialist teaching and support in mainstream classes.

- 99 In a small minority of schools, staff cannot make the best provision for pupils with EAL, because pupils' language needs are not assessed immediately they arrive in school. This information is important to help the school to identify each pupil's stage of language acquisition and the kind of work needed to develop their Welsh and English skills further.
- 100 In the most effective lessons, schools make certain that:
- pupils use talk to develop their ideas orally in response to what they read;
  - there is an emphasis on helping pupils to rehearse and organise their ideas before writing;
  - there is close monitoring of pupils' progress in developing fluent, accurate and confident language skills; and
  - learning support assistants and peer 'buddies' provide additional individual support for individuals and groups in reading and writing.
- 101 Case study 13 provides an example of effective literacy support for pupils for whom English is an additional language.

## School libraries and learning-resource centres

- 102 School libraries and learning-resource centres can help pupils to become enthusiastic readers, discover information and learn research skills. As a result, pupils can become better learners and develop responsibility for their own learning. A majority of primary and secondary schools have good library facilities and learning-resource centres but libraries are central to pupils' learning in only a minority of schools. In the section that follows, reference to school libraries also includes learning-resource centres.
- 103 In the best practice, school libraries are central to the school's drive to foster reading for pleasure and for learning. Staff have clear expectations of how the library can support learning, such as helping pupils to become enthusiastic readers, discover information and learn research skills. School policies and plans make certain that the school library is educationally inclusive in promoting and achieving use by all groups of pupils. The library accommodation is attractive and accessible to pupils in and out of school hours and there are opportunities for the wider community to share the use of the library, which helps to ensure that the library contributes effectively to lifelong learning.
- 104 In these schools, staff recognise and value the library's role in helping to raise standards. Across the school, staff have a clear understanding and expectation of how the library can support learning. The librarian or teacher-in-charge works closely with school staff to maximise the effectiveness of pupils' work in the library, such as helping pupils to acquire and use information retrieval skills, including the use of information and communications technology. Curriculum planning and school improvement plans recognise the important role of the library. Regular monitoring and evaluation of the work of the library enables staff to judge its effectiveness in contributing to pupils' learning. Case study 14 in Appendix 1 shows how a secondary school has used the library to contribute very effectively to pupils' learning.
- 105 The best school libraries provide a very wide range of books and non-book information sources at different levels to meet the needs and interests of all pupils. Staff use the library to maximise pupils' learning and complement and extend the work that pupils do in class. For example, the library is used to support and promote school initiatives, such as reading circles and young writers' groups.
- 106 Many schools could do more to raise standards, by:
- maximising the use they make of the library to support the teaching of reading and writing;
  - planning for the use of the library in all subjects across the curriculum; and
  - finding out how well the library contributes to pupils' learning, so that staff can judge its effectiveness and improve how it is used.

### Transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3

- 107 In the last few years, almost all secondary schools and their partner primary schools have begun to work more closely to make the curriculum and teaching in Years 6 and 7 more seamless. The most common work to improve transition has been the planning of bridging units of work often in Welsh and English that link work done in years 6 and 7. This work has helped to improve continuity in pupils' learning as they transfer to the next stage of their education.
- 108 Recently, most schools have given a higher priority to achieving continuity in language development. Their work has been in one or more of the follow areas:
- curriculum planning;
  - teaching methods; and
  - assessment and tracking pupils' progress.
- 109 This work is also helping to improve arrangements for pupils when they transfer from the primary to the secondary phase.
- 110 In the best practice, primary and secondary school staff:
- plan common schemes of work in Welsh and English for pupils from the age of 7-14;
  - share information about pupils' prior achievements and learning needs in reading and writing;
  - use this information to help teaching to be pitched at the right level and work for pupils to be stretching and challenging;
  - recognise the importance of continuity in using teaching methods and forms of classroom organisation for learning; and
  - ensure that reading and writing skills are taught consistently in all areas of learning across the school.
- 111 Case studies 15 and 16 in Appendix 1 provide examples of how two schools have improved pupils' transition in this way.
- 112 Even better schools often omit important aspects of good transitional arrangements. In particular, staff do not share enough first-hand evidence, for example, pupils' reading logs and the best pieces of pupils' extended written work, which provide a secure starting point for work in reading and writing in Year 7. As a result, many able pupils in Year 7 are not challenged enough and their progress is too slow. At the same time, less able pupils do not always get the help they need to consolidate their reading and writing skills because staff do not know enough about their learning needs.

- 113 Across many secondary schools, there are still false assumptions about pupils' competence and independence as readers and writers by the time they move to secondary schools. In some secondary schools, there is too much testing of pupils in Year 7 to find out information that usually already exists in their previous school. This is a waste of valuable time.



## Leadership and management

### In primary and secondary schools

- 114 The role of senior leaders and managers is crucial to improving standards of literacy because they can secure a whole-school commitment to the work. Inspection evidence shows that the overall quality of leadership and management in primary and secondary schools has improved over recent years, and this includes leadership of literacy initiatives.
- 115 The expertise and leadership of staff with roles of responsibility, such as the Welsh and English subject leaders in primary schools, the heads of the Welsh and English departments as well as school literacy co-ordinator in secondary schools, have also contributed significantly to effective learning and teaching of Welsh and English.
- 116 Most primary schools make literacy a whole-school priority and monitor standards in reading and writing more rigorously and consistently than most secondary schools. Although literacy strategies in secondary schools are better than they were, in all but a few schools they have not had the same impact on standards as they have had in primary schools. Case studies 17 and 18 in Appendix 1 provide examples of successful leadership in raising standards.
- 117 Many schools review and sample pupils' work to help them to evaluate the standards pupils' achieve. They use the information to improve the quality of learning and teaching. However, only a minority evaluate the impact of their literacy initiatives rigorously enough and plan for further improvement. Most schools do not routinely or systematically evaluate the impact of changes in teaching methods on standards or the quality of pupils' work in a way that would help them use the findings to make further improvements and spread good practice more widely.
- 118 In most primary and secondary schools, standards of reading are usually higher than standards of writing. However, not all schools ensure that their improvement plans target attention and support where it is needed most. Over the past 10 years, reading has been the greatest priority for improvement in school plans. Writing has received far less attention despite lower standards of writing in many schools.
- 119 All schools need to:
- target initiatives for improvement on the weaker aspects of Welsh and English evident within the school; and
  - focus on the groups of pupils and individuals, including boys who make least progress in developing their reading or writing skills.
- 120 The learning and teaching of reading and writing need to be as good as they can possibly be if pupils in schools across Wales are to achieve higher standards.

## **The work of local authorities**

- 121 Local authorities have a key strategic role in ensuring that schools give priority to developing pupils' literacy skills and providing support and resources that enable them to do so. All authorities have a literacy strategy but the quality of these strategies and long term planning varies unduly, particularly in respect of improving standards at key stage 3.
- 122 Local authorities fulfil their role best when:
- there is a well developed whole authority literacy strategy to develop pupils' communication skills that includes, explicitly, the action that the authority and schools will take to improve teaching and standards of reading and writing;
  - there is a clear long term improvement plan based on a good understanding of trends and performance in individual primary and secondary schools;
  - resources from a range of sources, for example, from the authority, the Welsh Assembly Government and Basic Skills Cymru, are carefully matched to improve reading and writing where standards need improving most;
  - there is a good range of guidance and exemplar materials for teaching and assessing reading and writing;
  - schools can access specialists who can provide training and support to help them improve the teaching of reading and writing;
  - there is support for assessment and moderation of reading and writing so that staff assess consistently, particularly across years 6 and 7; and
  - there is frequent monitoring and thorough evaluation to make certain that the learning and teaching of reading and writing are as good as they can be.
- 123 Case study 19 in Appendix 1 shows how a very clear long-term plan in one local authority has led to consistently high standards of literacy in key stages 1 and 2 and improved standards at key stage 3.
- 124 All local authorities try to provide a range of support for literacy. Some authorities do this better than others because they have designated advisers or because they are part of a consortium or an organisation that provides school improvement services across a number of local authorities. In most authorities, there is good support for reading in key stages 2 and 3 that builds on the development of early reading skills. There is often less support for writing, particularly in key stage 3 and when pupils transfer from primary to secondary school. There is significant inconsistency across authorities in the amount of specialist support that authorities provide to help staff improve pupils' reading and writing at key stage 3.
- 125 All local authorities use performance data, inspection outcomes and other evidence well to evaluate schools' performance, particularly in English and Welsh as core subjects in the National Curriculum. However, not all authorities analyse specific data for reading and writing, or do so in sufficient detail, to identify schools most in need of improvement in these key aspects of literacy.

126 Most authorities have given a lot of attention to supporting schools in understanding and addressing the differences between boys' and girls' achievement in literacy. Few authorities have given the same amount of attention to improving the literacy skills of other groups most at risk of underachievement, including pupils in pupil referral units and some ethnic minority learners. Although there are some good initiatives to motivate more able and talented pupils, few local authorities have ways to measure the impact of their policies for more able and talented pupils.

## **Appendix 1: Case studies which exemplify best practice in improving pupils' reading and writing skills in key stages 2 and 3**

### **Curriculum planning for Welsh and English**

#### **Case study 1**

##### **Background**

Following an audit of how staff were teaching English in a junior school, the subject leader identified that pupils in Year 6 could achieve higher standards if the work was progressively more demanding at earlier stages.

##### **Strategy**

The school revised its scheme of work to improve progression. The new scheme of work identifies objectives, skills, activities and texts in speaking and listening, reading and writing for each age group. The scheme of work informs termly, weekly and lesson planning. Pupils focus on developing their understanding of language at whole text, sentence and word level more progressively than before.

##### **Outcome**

Staff are able to plan more demanding work in Year 6 because all pupils have developed a very good range of higher-order reading and extended writing skills by the end of Year 5.

#### **Case study 2**

##### **Background**

In a secondary school, staff wanted to ensure that they were giving good attention to the study of poetry. They know that poetry increases pupils' understanding of language because it is often written with an intensity and economy of language for effect.

##### **Strategy**

Staff first reviewed their planning to determine how much attention was given to poetry in key stage 3. They were pleased to note that poetry featured in the work but recognised that it could have a more prominent role, which would increase pupils' understanding of language. They wanted to use poetry more to focus pupils' attention on the technique of writing and its impact on the reader. They decided to use more challenging and interesting poems from different historical periods and arranged for pupils to work with visiting poets.

##### **Outcome**

The department now gives greater priority to poetry and more challenging texts have stimulated pupils' keener analysis and probing for meaning. Pupils learn skills that they transfer to longer pieces of writing in other genres. As a result, the standard of pupils' written work is very good indeed.

## Planning for developing pupils' communication skills across the curriculum

### Case study 3

#### Background

In a Welsh-medium secondary school, staff believed that many pupils who do not have Welsh as a first language would benefit from additional support to develop their Welsh vocabulary in subjects across the curriculum.

#### Strategy

Staff decided that they would produce a pocket-sized bilingual literacy handbook for pupils and parents.

The first section of the handbook contains lists of all the specialised vocabulary for all subjects, which are useful for pupils in Year 7 to Year 9. This section offers the Welsh term, an English translation and then the definition or explanation in Welsh for **all subjects** of the curriculum.

The second section explains the school's use of symbols for marking pupils' work. This section also includes useful advice on how to write the date in Welsh, the alphabet, vowels, consonants and punctuation and useful grammar rules.

The third section explains the Welsh terminology used in public examinations in detail, which helps pupils access standard Welsh well. This section also gives examples of common Welsh errors in writing and the correct version of these forms.

The fourth section includes examples of different writing frames, which can be used to write in different forms, such as producing a chronological report or organising instructions for making models in design technology.

The final section focuses on the content of work studied during key stage 3 and the assessments that pupils undertake. Each subject department within the school contributes useful guidance on the National Curriculum level descriptions.

#### Outcome

Pupils and parents who do not have Welsh as a first language have found the literacy handbook invaluable. Pupils regularly use the handbook in their subject studies and this has improved the accuracy of their spelling and terminology. Parents are better informed about the work that pupils do in their studies across the curriculum.

#### **Case study 4**

##### **Background**

In a secondary school, staff decided that they needed to develop a stronger focus on pupils' communication skills when they transferred to the school in Year 7.

##### **Strategy**

Together, heads of department planned an approach that would appeal to pupils' interests. They arranged a week of alternative activities developed around a theme from a set of popular books for children and called the project 'Bishwarts'. This alternative curriculum programme stimulated pupils' interest and excitement and, at the same time, provided opportunities for all staff to be involved in the design and delivery of activities that promoted communication skills. This work reinforced messages about the important contribution of subject studies to developing these skills.

##### **Outcome**

At the end of the programme, staff and pupils gained an improved knowledge and awareness of communication skills. In addition, staff benefited from working together to deliver a successful themed programme, which could be extended across the school.

#### **The assessment of Welsh and English**

#### **Case study 5**

##### **Background**

A primary school decided to involve pupils more in the assessment of their work to help them gain more independence and confidence in their writing.

##### **Strategy**

Staff devised a self-assessment framework and adapted these frameworks according to pupils' age and ability. Each pupil has his or her own framework, which identifies key features of writing that should be included in the pupil's work. For example, younger pupils are required to consider if they have used capital letters at the beginning of sentences and finished sentences with a full stop. Older pupils are required to evaluate techniques used for different genres, such as the journalistic features they use when writing newspaper reports. Teachers make certain that pupils know how these frameworks should be used.

##### **Outcome**

Pupils have become more discerning about the quality of their work. For example, they are more aware of the need to improve their expression and accuracy in writing and expression. When written work is marked and the teacher notes spelling mistakes, pupils have to try and spell the word independently before the teacher gives the correct version.

## **Case study 6**

### **Background**

In a Welsh-medium secondary school, staff decided they needed to increase the range of resources to support pupils' writing.

### **Strategy**

Staff already provided a range of commercial resources for pupils, including Welsh dictionaries, grammar books and thesauri. They supplemented these resources with a range of other materials, such as cerdyn treigliadau (Welsh mutation cards) for spelling and vocabulary and bwrdd barddoniaeth (a poetry board card) to help pupils identify masculine and feminine nouns to describe metres and rhymes in Welsh poetry. Staff also developed a guide to give pupils a range of strategies to describe characters, locations, themes and actions in a novel. Nabod nofel (knowing a novel), includes questions that require pupils to consider the character's language, dress, personality, attitudes, physical appearance and other characteristics. The guide offers a good range of adjectives to describe characters.

### **Outcome**

Pupils use the resources independently to check spellings, vocabulary, language patterns and mutations in the course of their work. This has improved pupils' written work and their independent learning skills as they can check the accuracy of their work themselves.

## **Tackling boys' underachievement**

### **Case study 7**

#### **Background**

A primary school with a very high proportion of pupils who qualify for free school meals recognised that many boys throughout the school had more limited language development and often lower levels of maturity and confidence than girls.

#### **Strategy**

The staff worked together to make a number of changes to the way that learning and teaching of literacy occurred. These changes included:

- using recent research to influence their teaching approaches and improve the content of work to make it more interesting for boys and girls and help all pupils to succeed;
- making better use of oral and group work to rehearse and aid learning;
- using rewards and encouragement more to boost confidence and self-esteem;
- developing an intensive withdrawal programme for pupils at the beginning of key stage 2 who are behind their peers so that they can catch up quickly;
- changing curriculum planning to include more time spent on phonics, for example, in years 4 and 5, focusing on 'chunking' multisyllable words to decode and encode so that pupils learn – right sound, different sound picture' in their reading and 'right sound, wrong sound picture' in their writing; and
- improving library provision so that all pupils now have better access to good quality, stimulating resources at an appropriate level to enthuse poor readers, especially boys.

**Outcome**

Over the past three years, the achievement of boys has improved significantly and there is little discernible difference between boys' and girls' performance.

**Meeting the needs of less able pupils****Case study 8****Background**

Staff in a Welsh-medium primary school felt that less-able pupils were not making enough progress in reading and writing and they needed to do more to support them in gaining these skills.

**Strategy**

They decided to hold weekly staff meetings to discuss the progress of pupils with learning difficulties. At these meetings, staff share information about these pupils, consider strategies and suggest solutions. For example, in some cases, the way forward may involve a change of grouping for literacy, amendments to curriculum planning or referral to outside agencies. The school recognises that some difficulties can be resolved in the short term and acts quickly in these circumstances for pupils' benefit. Where there are greater challenges because of pupils' more severe difficulties in literacy, staff determine a clear strategy to help these pupils make progress.

**Outcome**

The school has developed a much more coherent and systematic approach for identifying and supporting pupils with literacy difficulties. As pupils' learning difficulties and progress are reviewed on a very regular basis, their difficulties are often addressed more quickly. Strategies for supporting pupils' learning are developed by drawing on the expertise of all staff and support agencies are used well to help the school respond to pupils' difficulties.

**Case study 9****Background**

A secondary school wanted to develop a literacy programme for pupils in Year 7 whose achievement did not reach the expected level at the end of key stage 2. They knew that these pupils were most at risk of slipping further behind at key stage 3.

**Strategy**

Pupils are taught in small groups for one lesson each week. Work includes group reading, spelling and vocabulary, reading for information retrieval, higher order reading skills and work at word and sentence level in writing. A particularly good feature is the close match of the work to pupil's individual needs. All programmes have clear objectives and learning targets. The amount of time pupils receive on the programme sensibly reduces as they make progress. All staff in the school know the content of this literacy support programme and use this information to help pupils in their subject studies across the curriculum.



**Outcome**

The programme helps to secure pupils' reading and writing skills and gives them better access to their subject studies. Over recent years, almost all the pupils on this programme achieved the level expected nationally of 14 year olds by the end of key stage 3.

**Case study 10****Background**

In a medium sized secondary school, staff introduced an innovative literacy intervention programme in Year 9 to provide pupils with the opportunity to catch up and consolidate reading and writing skills before GCSE. The programme targets pupils most at risk of underachieving at key stage 4.

**Strategy**

The programme is offered to pupils as a choice from a range of pre-GCSE subject tasters. Normally, about 60 pupils from a cohort of around 200 choose to do the programme. This is a remarkable number given the attractiveness of the alternatives for pupils.

Pupils are taught in small groups of around 10 for two hours each week. The course complements work in English and focuses on higher order reading skills and organising ideas, length and accuracy in writing. While the intervention programme is expensive to run because it requires 12 'teacher' lessons a week, the school values this investment because less able pupils are enabled to do well in range of subjects at GCSE.

**Outcome**

A very few pupils leave this school without a qualification.

**Meeting the needs of more-able and talented pupils****Case study 11****Background**

The junior section of a primary school recognised that more-able pupils would benefit from specialist provision to extend their learning.

**Strategy**

More-able pupils from each year group in key stage 2 attend an 'Excellence' class for half an hour each week to explore challenging reading texts, including Shakespeare.

**Outcome**

The 'Excellence' class provides pupils with good opportunities to develop higher-order skills of critical analysis and thinking. Their work is mature and perceptive. The work done in this class has inspired pupils to extend the range of their own personal reading.

## **Case study 12**

### **Background**

In a secondary school, staff had identified about 30 more-able and talented pupils in key stage 3.

### **Strategy**

The English department decided to form a group for more-able and talented pupils. The group, comprising similar numbers of boys and girls in key stage 3, meets with the head of department weekly. Pupils have a very challenging reading list to guide their personal reading and about half this group attend writing workshops at Ty Newydd, the National Writers' Centre for Wales in north Wales, to work with professional writers. These pupils have formed a writing club and email their work to each other. They meet to discuss their reading and writing and recommend books to each other.

### **Outcome**

Year 8 pupils from this group reached the final of the World Literature Quiz. They were the only pupils from a maintained school in Wales to do so.

## **Meeting the needs of pupils for whom English is an additional language**

## **Case study 13**

### **Background**

In one large secondary school, there are over 50 pupils with EAL in key stage 3. The head of learning support uses a carefully staged model of language acquisition to assess pupils' linguistic ability in English when they arrive in the school. Partner primary schools use a similar assessment model and pass on information about pupils with EAL when they change schools. There are five stages of language acquisition in each of the following strands:

- speaking and listening;
- accessing information;
- reading and understanding; and
- writing.

### **Strategy**

An initial assessment of each pupil is used to plan work at an appropriate level in language and in all other subjects. This information also provides a baseline to measure pupils' language development every half term. Staff have guidance for each of the five strands in how to develop a range of skills, for example, in reading – initial reading skills, fluency, expression, understanding and inferring meaning, and, in writing – spelling, vocabulary, fluency, punctuation, styles of writing, use of language and organisation.

**Outcome**

Throughout the school, all staff understand the different stages of language acquisition, which helps them to support pupils. Pupils who make less progress than others are given additional help to catch up with their peers. As a result, pupils with EAL make good progress and go on to gain a range of qualifications in key stage 4.

**Effective use of the school library****Case study 14****Background**

In a high performing secondary school, all pupils in Year 7 are encouraged to read a diverse and challenging range of books, trying out new authors and genres previously unfamiliar to them.

**Strategy**

A reading group (voluntary and open to all) meets regularly in the school library. Members of the reading group receive a 'champion reader' certificate and small prize. There is a book token for the pupil who has read the widest and most challenging range of books and displayed 'passion' for reading.

**Outcome**

The reading group is very popular and this work has created a school community of readers who enjoy talking about books. The quality of pupils' writing has been influenced and improved by their wider reading.

**Improving transition between primary and secondary schools****Case study 15****Background**

The head of the English department of a secondary school wanted to improve continuity and progression in curriculum planning between key stages 2 and 3. She knew that all of the partner primary schools used the same scheme of work produced by the local authority.

**Strategy**

Staff agreed to plan the key stage 3 curriculum to the same format as the primary scheme of work. This planning was organised around seven different types of text and included work at text, sentence and word levels.

**Outcome**

By drawing on the work pupils studied in key stage 2, the head of department ensured better continuity in pupils' learning as they transferred to the secondary school. In the secondary school, English teachers developed a keener understanding of the range of texts pupils studied in key stage 2, for example, the work of Shakespeare. The department then introduced texts that are more challenging at an earlier stage. As a result, pupils' transition in literacy from key stage 2 to 3 is very good and they undertake work that is progressively more demanding. This approach helps pupils to achieve high standards.

## **Case study 16**

### **Background**

In a large primary school, subject leaders have designated time for monitoring the standards of pupils' work. The English subject leader has one day each term.

### **Strategy**

Staff always agree a focus for this monitoring. This focus may be related to a whole school target or a particular area that has been identified as needing attention.

Recent monitoring in literacy has focused on:

- progression in spelling;
- listening to learners to gain their views on literacy lessons; and
- the structure of lessons and the explicit teaching of literacy skills.

### **Outcome**

The subject leader writes up the findings and shares these with the headteacher and staff on a termly basis. At the end of each year, the school has a training day to develop the new school improvement plan and all subject leaders' evaluations help to decide on priorities for the next year. Before this occurs, staff carry out an individual self-assessment. The results of this assessment are analysed to identify common themes and training issues that may need to be included in the school improvement plan.

## **Leading and managing improvements**

### **Case study 17**

#### **Background**

In a Welsh-medium primary school, the headteacher gives priority to developing literacy skills in Welsh and English in the school improvement plan, staff meetings and the school's annual self-evaluation. He ensures that subject leaders in Welsh and English have regular timetabled non-contact time for planning and monitoring progress carefully through classroom observation and regular scrutiny of pupils' work.

The school has identified oral skills in both languages and spelling in English as priorities for improvement.

#### **Strategy**

The school has been developing oral skills over a two year period. It has focused on talk in the foundation phase first so that pupils are more confident speakers by Year 3. Spelling in English has been identified as a major challenge and the school is giving particular attention to using a phonic approach to reading and spelling when pupils begin to learn English formally in Year 3.

Well-qualified learning staff, including learning support assistants had further training in developing pupils' oral skills and phonic awareness. To support their work, the school made good use of its RAISE grant to employ an additional member of staff. This support assistant works on a one to one basis with a small number of pupils who need an intensive level of support as well as with small groups of pupils who need to improve specific aspects of reading and writing.

### **Outcome**

Standards in both English and Welsh are good and improving. Pupils speak clearly and use good vocabulary in both languages with confidence. Spelling is improving because all staff follow well-developed whole school strategies.

## **Case study 18**

### **Background**

In a secondary school where standards of reading and writing are particularly good, literacy is a whole-school priority. The headteacher drives the agenda strongly. The literacy co-ordinator leads developments in literacy throughout the school, co-ordinates literacy initiatives and provides support for departments and individual staff in teaching reading and writing skills. This is a permanent post in the school's staffing structure and the post holder works closely with the senior management team. She has time on her timetable to carry out her responsibilities.

### **Strategy**

The school has focused on the following three areas to raise standards:

- oral work in lessons;
- thinking skills including thinking and talking about texts; and
- extended writing and the use of writing frames to scaffold and shape writing.

There are two major school reviews each year. In recent years, these have included a review of communication skills and oracy in lessons.

All 12 of the school's learning support assistants have had training in teaching reading and writing and there is a specialist support assistant who works with identified pupils, including those who are more-able and talented, in and outside English lessons. The school's newsletter for parents always includes an item on reading or writing and parents receive clear guidance on how they can help their children develop these skills at home.

### **Outcome**

Arrangements have had a significant impact on improving standards of reading and writing, particularly with less able pupils. Staff share good practice, for example, the use of a 'listening frame' to help pupils to record and structure their ideas in writing and encourage more extended oral contributions, including justification of answers, to improve the length and content of written work. Pupils' oral and written work has improved because of a much stronger focus by all staff on vocabulary and syntax.

## **Case study 19**

### **Background**

One local authority has a very clear long-term literacy strategy that has been implemented over the past 10 years. Elected members have approved significant additional funding to develop and maintain high literacy standards. This funding makes it possible for schools to implement long-term programmes to drive forward improvement. For example, it has enabled the authority to provide a reading recovery and writing programme in primary schools that, over many years, has achieved exceptionally high standards.

### **Strategy**

The very experienced literacy advisory team provides high-quality advice and training for schools that includes:

- sustained support including demonstration lessons, shared teaching and training in about 10 primary schools each term;
- training and support for a good range of catch-up and literacy acceleration programmes for underachieving pupils aged 6-14 in the large majority of the authority's primary and secondary schools;
- an eight day training course for primary school language coordinators that includes modules on early reading, developing higher order reading skills at key stage 2, early writing, extending writing skills at key stage 2, using drama in the classroom, assessment, monitoring and subject evaluation and management;
- regular training and school support for established networks of staff that play a key part in putting the authority's literacy strategy into action, including senior managers responsible for literacy in secondary schools, primary headteachers, literacy co-ordinators, secondary heads of department and primary subject leaders, literacy acceleration tutors and learning support assistants.

Factors that contribute to the success of the authority's work are the use of data specifically for reading and writing so that support is targeted at schools and groups of pupils that are not achieving well. Careful research into successful literacy initiatives in Europe and elsewhere has informed training programmes. Over a number of years, the authority has also worked systematically with networks of key personnel to put initiatives into place.

### **Outcome**

Over the past 10 years, results in English in key stages 1 and 2 have been consistently very good and standards at key stage 3 are improving. Advisory staff provide high-quality support for schools, for example, in providing training in teaching reading and writing skills in key stages 2 and 3. The authority has identified shortcomings in writing and has made teaching and assessment of writing a priority for 2008.

## **Appendix 2: Questions for leaders and managers to use in reviewing and improving practice**

The questions in this section are designed to help schools to review areas of their work in Welsh and English and in developing communication skills in all subjects in order to drive improvement further.

### **Curriculum planning for Welsh and English**

- Are the learning and teaching of oracy, reading and writing integrated into a high-quality scheme of work that includes clear teaching objectives, the specific knowledge, understanding and skills that pupils should gain at text, sentence and word levels?
- Are there interesting and varied tasks and specific learning outcomes for each aspect of language?
- Does planning build on what pupils learn in the foundation phase and enable pupils to develop literacy skills progressively through key stages 2 and 3?
- Do staff plan ways to ensure pupils make the best possible progress when they transfer from Year 2 to Year 3, from Year 6 to Year 7 and from Year 9 to Year 10?
- Do reading and writing tasks and activities become increasingly more challenging and complex and enable pupils to develop and refine their literacy skills?
- Is there good coverage of a rich and wide range of literary and non-literary texts and media across different genres and forms to develop reading and writing to high levels?
- Does planning refer to reading materials and writing tasks that will appeal to boys' and girls' interests, including hobby and sport related materials and graphic writing?

### **Planning for reading**

- Does planning in key stage 2 consolidate and develop further the reading skills that pupils have developed in key stage 1?
- Is there a continuing focus on phonics in key stage 2, particularly in English, which helps to secure pupils' knowledge of language and their ability to use this knowledge to decode words?
- Does work encourage pupils' personal response to a wide range of interesting and varied texts in poetry, prose and drama and non-literary and media texts?

- Do staff provide reading lists and initiatives that encourage pupils to read independently and to explore a wide range of books beyond their favourite authors and kinds of texts?
- Are pupils' higher-order reading skills, including skimming, scanning, inference and deduction progressively developed?
- Are there progressively more challenging texts in key stage 3, which build on pupils' prior reading experience and extend their reading skills?
- Is there a strong focus on understanding and comprehension of what they read and opportunities for pupils to check their assumptions against the text?
- Is there good attention to the development of library and information retrieval skills and do staff plan regular opportunities for pupils to use school and public libraries and the internet for pleasure and research?

### **Planning for writing**

- Does work in key stage 2 build on and extend the independent writing skills that pupils have developed in key stage 1?
- Does the scheme of work identify the forms of writing that pupils will develop and progressively across key stages 2 and 3?
- Does planning include writing for different purposes and audiences?
- Does work focus on the stylistic features and characteristics of different kinds of writing, including informal and formal modes of writing?
- Is there progressive development of the skills pupils need to express and organise ideas using different sentence structures, paragraphing and layout of texts?
- Is there a focus on words and their meaning so that pupils learn to extend their vocabulary and to express themselves with increasing precision?
- Is attention given to strategies to help pupils spell and punctuate accurately?
- Are there opportunities for pupils to talk about their own and others' writing and understand how language is used for effect?
- Is attention given to planning, drafting, revising, proofreading and polishing pieces of written work, using ICT where appropriate?



## **Developing the communication skills of reading and writing across the curriculum**

- Is work guided by a whole-school literacy policy that ensures coherence and makes developing pupils' reading and writing skills the responsibility of all staff?
- Are the specific aspects of reading and writing to be developed progressively throughout the school clearly identified so that staff know which skills are to be taught and when?
- Is the development of reading and writing skills strongly embedded in all subject schemes of work and lesson plans?
- Are there opportunities for pupils to use their developing reading and writing skills according to the nature of the subject, such as applying their higher-order reading and research skills to their studies in history and geography or writing up investigations in science?
- Do all staff know the reading abilities of different pupils, so that reading materials and tasks studied in subjects are pitched at the right level, in terms of length and challenge?
- Do staff teach and explain the meaning of subject terminology?
- Do staff ensure that pupils read from a range of sources, including the internet, and carry out research independently?
- Do staff discuss and develop ideas orally with pupils before asking them to write?
- Do staff teach pupils directly the conventions of the kinds of writing that are used in their subjects?
- Do staff help pupils to develop their ideas through judicious use of 'writing frames' or 'scaffolds' that help pupils structure and extend their writing and do they reduce this support as pupils are able to be independent?
- Do staff help pupils to write accurately by giving attention to spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, sentence structure and the expression of ideas relevant to writing in their subjects?

## **Teaching Welsh and English**

- Do staff have sound subject expertise and knowledge and use these effectively to help pupils develop and secure their skills in Welsh and English?
- Do staff link oral, reading and writing activities in lessons so that pupils learn that these modes are interdependent?

- Do staff teach skills explicitly through demonstration and explanation so that pupils can apply what they have learnt for themselves?
- Are activities and tasks well-matched to pupils' needs and abilities?
- Do staff use approaches like role play or 'hot-seating' to engage pupils' interest and enable them to better understand the issues they study?
- Do staff and learning support assistants work closely together to support pupils' learning needs, such as planning together and sharing assessment information?
- Do staff draw on 'learning to learn' strategies and develop thinking skills to enable pupils to become independent learners?
- Do staff convey enthusiasm for language so that pupils enjoy reading and expressing themselves well?

### **Teaching reading**

- Do staff in key stage 2 continue to focus on phonics, in particular in English, to help pupils secure their knowledge of language and use this knowledge to decode?
- Do staff make effective use of approaches, such as shared, group and guided reading that improve pupils' reading and comprehension skills?
- Do staff ensure that pupils learn to read in different ways for different purposes, for example, locating information, understanding bias, inferring characters' motives?
- Are teaching materials varied, so that they are not only print-based but include a range of media, such as videos and magazines, which helps to motivate pupils, particularly boys?
- Do staff help pupils to be more discerning readers because they require pupils to make decisions about the accuracy and quality of the information and views they read?
- Do staff give pupils high-quality texts to read because they know that the quality of pupils' writing is usually directly related to the quality of what they read and hear?
- Do staff encourage pupils to read widely for pleasure, become engrossed in stories, enter fictional worlds and develop leisure reading habits that are essential for a full life?
- Do staff make good use of national and local initiatives, such as 'Shadowing the Carnegie Medal' and Basic Skills Cymru's 'Read a Million Words' to motivate pupils to read?

## **Teaching writing**

- Is writing taught as a process of composition that includes creating, revising, editing and sharing drafts with others?
- Does oral work precede writing and is there good questioning and discussion which stimulates pupils to think of ideas for themselves?
- Do pupils and staff work together on a piece of 'shared' writing to model the writing process so that pupils understand how writing involves different aspects of composition?
- Do pupils write for real purposes and audiences, for example, articles for magazines, reviews for the book club and imaginative writing, such as stories, poems and drama scripts, which are shared with others?
- Do pupils learn the characteristics of different kinds of writing, the reasons for the different text types and different techniques, such as alliteration, imagery and rhythm that writers use to create particular effect?
- Do staff provide rich and powerful stimuli for writing, such as a novel or short story, film, a play or poetry or a non-literacy stimulus such as a pamphlet, an article in a newspaper or from television or film?
- Do staff pay particular attention to structure, word order (syntax) and vocabulary and how writers use various techniques for effect?
- Do pupils have opportunities to work with professional writers such as journalists, story tellers and poets?
- Is there clear guidance for pupils to help them with spelling, punctuation and grammar and do staff give attention to these aspects of writing in a consistent way?
- Do pupils use ICT for text composition, different kinds of presentation and to edit their work?
- Do staff set an extended piece of writing regularly that is read and marked by them according to the learning objectives?

## **Assessing Welsh and English**

- Do pupils know the objectives of activities and tasks and what they are learning to achieve?
- Do staff make certain that assessment criteria – 'success criteria' – are an integral part of planning, teaching, learning, feedback and marking so pupils know what they are learning and how well they are doing?

- Is marking linked to assessment criteria so that it is focused and constructive rather than highlighting all errors, which can be demotivating?
- Do staff provide guidance and feedback to individual pupils during lessons when they need it?
- Do staff provide oral and written feedback that refers specifically to what pupils have achieved and what aspects of work they need to improve?
- Does the marking provide a model for pupils to assess their own work and the work of others and make improvements on their own?
- Do staff and pupils track progress and plan for improvement in the short and longer term?
- Do staff use the features of progression from the National Curriculum level descriptions to motivate pupils and help them understand what they need to learn to do next?
- Do all staff use a whole-school marking policy consistently?

### **Assessing reading**

- Do staff probe and question pupils' responses to what they read in order to gain a better insight into pupils' understanding?
- Do staff assess pupils' reading progress in terms of fluency, understanding and range?
- When listening to pupils' read, do staff note the significant features of pupils' performance, such as words and sentence structures that they have difficulty with, and use this information to help pupils make progress?
- Do staff monitor the range of pupils' independent reading, for example, through regular scrutiny of pupils' reading journals, and do they give feedback and guidance to pupils to help them develop and extend their reading preferences and interests?

### **Assessing writing**

- Do staff mark written work carefully and have a clear focus, such as the content of the work or particular writing skills?
- Does marking relate to objectives which pupils understand?
- Is there a marking policy for writing that all staff and pupils understand and use consistently?

- Do staff make comments on pupils' work that identify strengths and areas to improve and provides guidance where there are specific errors?
- Is pupils' progress continuously monitored using evidence from a range of written work and does this information inform planning for the next step?

### **Using peer and self-assessment**

- Do staff help pupils to analyse and be critical of the strengths and weaknesses in their own work and the work of others?
- Do pupils receive clear 'success criteria' to assess their own or others' work so that they learn to focus on what they are learning, what they can do and what they need to do next to improve?
- Do pupils decide on their achievement from the information provided and determine themselves what they need to do to consolidate or extend their learning further?
- Are there clear guidelines for peer-marking by pupils and do staff emphasise that accuracy is very important with a common approach to looking at and correcting spelling, punctuation and paragraphing errors?
- Are there effective 'toolkits' to help pupils to look in detail at the techniques relating to different kinds of written work and do these help them to assess how well they and others have done?
- Do marking matrices for reading and writing show features of progression so that pupils can assess where they are on a continuum of development?

### **Tackling the underachievement of boys**

- Is there a clear focus on **which boys** are underachieving?
- Are lessons well planned with clear achievable aims that are shared with pupils and do pupils have a variety of stimulating activities?
- Does oral work precede reading and writing so that it helps to rehearse and better prepare all pupils for tasks?
- Do staff use approaches such as role play, drama and collaborative group work used to aid pupils' learning?
- Are all pupils helped to gain confidence in their literacy work and are they shown how to be successful, which is particularly important for boys as they need to see themselves as writers?
- Is there careful selection of materials, including fiction and non-fiction, media and moving image texts that appeal to boys and girls?

- Do staff use strategies, such as peer-mentoring and paired reading programmes that help all pupils to make progress?
- Do staff use resources, such as writing frames and templates effectively to support pupils' learning?
- Is there close monitoring of pupils' work with specific support for pupils who need help with organising their work?
- Do all pupils receive detailed feedback from staff about their work, which is particularly motivating for boys?
- Are writing tasks clearly structured and purposeful, and is each stage explained to pupils so that they know what they must do?
- Is there a keen emphasis on pupils checking their own work for accuracy and improved expression, matching their achievements to clear criteria?
- Do pupils write for real audiences which promotes pride in spelling and presentation?
- Is technology used to motivate and enable communication, reading and research?
- Are the seating and grouping arrangements in lessons varied and organised according to different criteria, so that these aspects bring maximum benefits to boys and girls' learning?
- Do staff challenge perceptions of gender stereotypes about reading and writing?

### **Meeting the needs of less able pupils**

- Are pupils who have difficulties with reading and writing identified at the earliest opportunity?
- Do they receive effective additional support according to their needs in reading and writing?
- Do they receive enough help to make them willing and competent writers?

### **Meeting the needs of more-able and talented pupils**

- Are more-able and talented pupils stretched to work at their highest level of ability?
- What arrangements are in place to encourage them to read widely and ambitiously?

- What kind of writing tasks are set that require research and high-level skills in original fiction, discursive, persuasive and polemical writing?

### **Providing for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL)**

- Are pupils' language needs assessed immediately when they arrive in school?
- Do pupils receive specialist teaching and support in mainstream classes to meet their needs and, where appropriate, in pairs and groups in separate language lessons?
- Is there a clear focus on using talk and developing ideas orally in response to what pupils read?
- Is there an emphasis on helping pupils to talk and organise their thinking before writing?
- Do staff monitor closely pupils' progress in developing language skills, particularly fluency, accuracy and confidence?
- Do learning support assistants and peer 'buddies' provide additional individual support for individuals and groups in reading and writing?
- Do all staff know each pupil's stage of language acquisition and the kind of work needed to develop their language skills further?

### **Using the school library**

- Is the library central to the school's drive to foster reading for pleasure and for learning?
- Is the library educationally inclusive in promoting and achieving use by all groups of pupils?
- Do all staff help to maximise pupils' learning through the use of the library, which can extend the work that pupils do in class?
- Is the library regularly and successfully involved in supporting and promoting school initiatives, such as homework clubs, reading circles and young writers' groups?
- Does the library provide a wide enough range of books and non-book information sources at different levels to meet the needs and interests of all pupils?
- Does the library have accommodation that is attractive and accessible to pupils in and out of school hours?
- Is the library linked to local library services or used by the wider community so that it contributes to lifelong learning.

## **Transition between primary and secondary schools**

- Do primary and secondary school staff plan common schemes of work in Welsh and English for pupils from the age of 7-14?
- Is there continuity across key stages 2 and 3 in using the most effective teaching methods and forms of classroom organisation for learning?
- Are there bridging units of work that link work done in years 6 and 7, which staff plan and assess together?
- Do staff from primary and secondary schools share information about pupils' prior achievements and learning needs in reading and writing so that teaching can be pitched at the right level and work is challenging?
- Do staff in secondary schools know what texts pupils have read before, in class and on their own, in order to plan increasingly challenging reading as the next step?
- Is staff's knowledge of pupils' writing abilities based on first-hand evidence of pupils' work, to ensure that pupils make further progress when they change schools?
- Do primary and secondary school staff assess and moderate the work of Year 6 pupils together and use portfolios of work that they have put together to agree levels of achievement in reading and writing?

## **Effective leadership and management**

- Is the headteacher directly involved in driving up standards in literacy to give status to the work throughout the school and to ensure it is a whole-school priority?
- Does the school have a whole-school literacy strategy and a senior manager responsible for literacy throughout the school?
- Do leaders and managers make certain that there are high expectations for pupils' achievement, expressed as challenging individual, class and whole school targets?
- Is developing pupils' literacy skills a regular part of the school improvement plan and do managers maintain a well-informed overview of literacy work?
- Do senior managers have a well-planned programme to review and evaluate the impact of literacy initiatives and do they use the findings to plan for further improvement?



- Do staff with leadership responsibilities have allocated time to plan with all staff, provide support, monitor and review and report to the senior management team and governors?
- Does the school target initiatives for improvement on the weaker aspects of literacy and for groups of pupils who make least progress in developing their reading or writing skills?
- Does the school make good use of RAISE and Basic Skills Cymru programmes to improve standards in reading and writing?
- Do senior managers regularly review and sample pupils' work and feedback findings to all staff?
- Do all key staff have a sound knowledge of the learning and teaching of literacy?
- Do staff receive regular and relevant training for teaching reading and writing and are they involved in literacy initiatives?
- Does the school use a wide range of intervention strategies that have a proven track record so that pupils can be helped to catch up with their peers?
- Is there good deployment of support staff so that they make a full contribution to supporting pupils?
- Are there strong links between infant and junior schools and between secondary schools and their partner primary schools so that pupils' transition is seamless?
- Is there frequent monitoring and thorough evaluation to make certain that the learning and teaching of reading and writing are as good as they can be?

### **The work of local authorities**

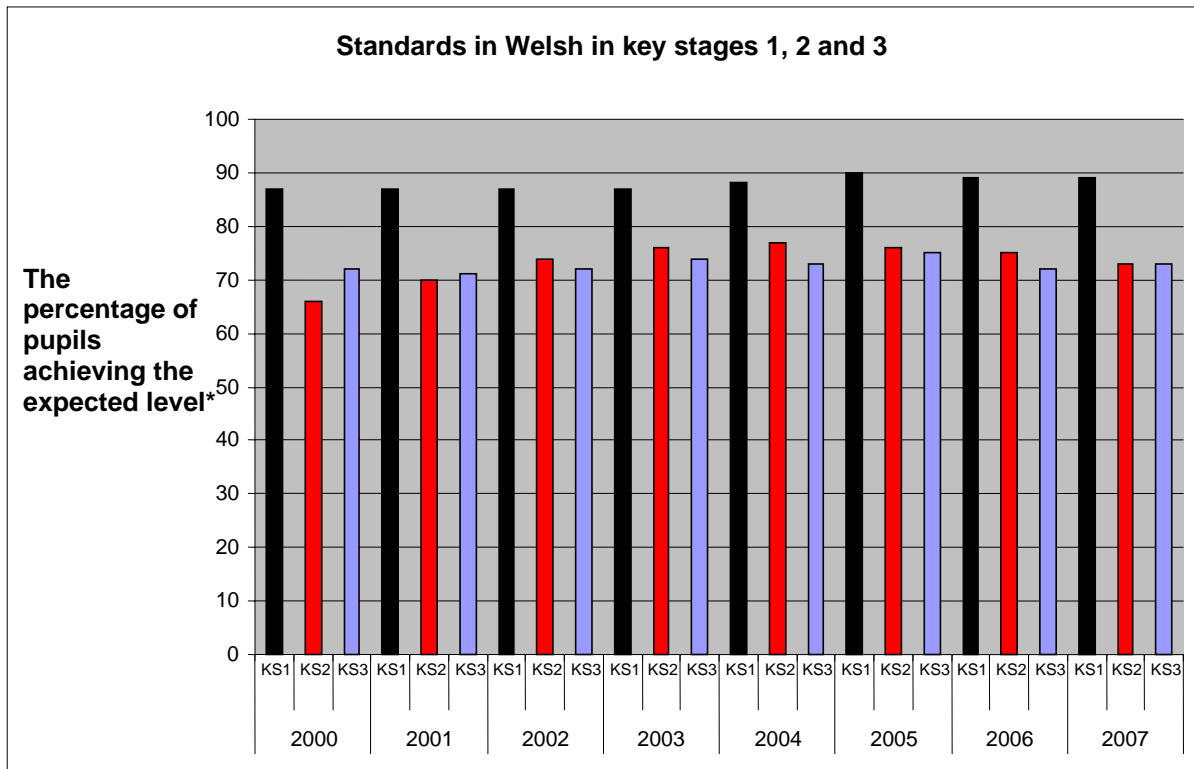
- Does the authority have a well-developed, whole-authority literacy strategy to develop pupils' communication skills that includes, explicitly, the action that the LEA and schools will take to improve teaching and standards of reading and writing?
- Is there a clear operational plan to improve reading and writing based on a good understanding of trends and performance in individual schools?
- Are resources from a range of sources, for example, from the authority, the Welsh Assembly Government and Basic Skills Cymru, carefully matched to improve reading and writing where standards need improving most?
- Does the authority provide a good range of guidance and exemplar materials for teaching and assessing reading and writing?

- Can schools access specialists who provide training and support to help them improve the teaching of reading and writing?
- Is there support for assessment and moderation on reading and writing so that staff assess consistently, particularly across years 6 and 7?
- Does the authority undertake frequent monitoring and thorough evaluation to make certain that the learning and teaching of reading and writing are as good as they can be?

## Appendix 3: Standards of achievement in Welsh and English

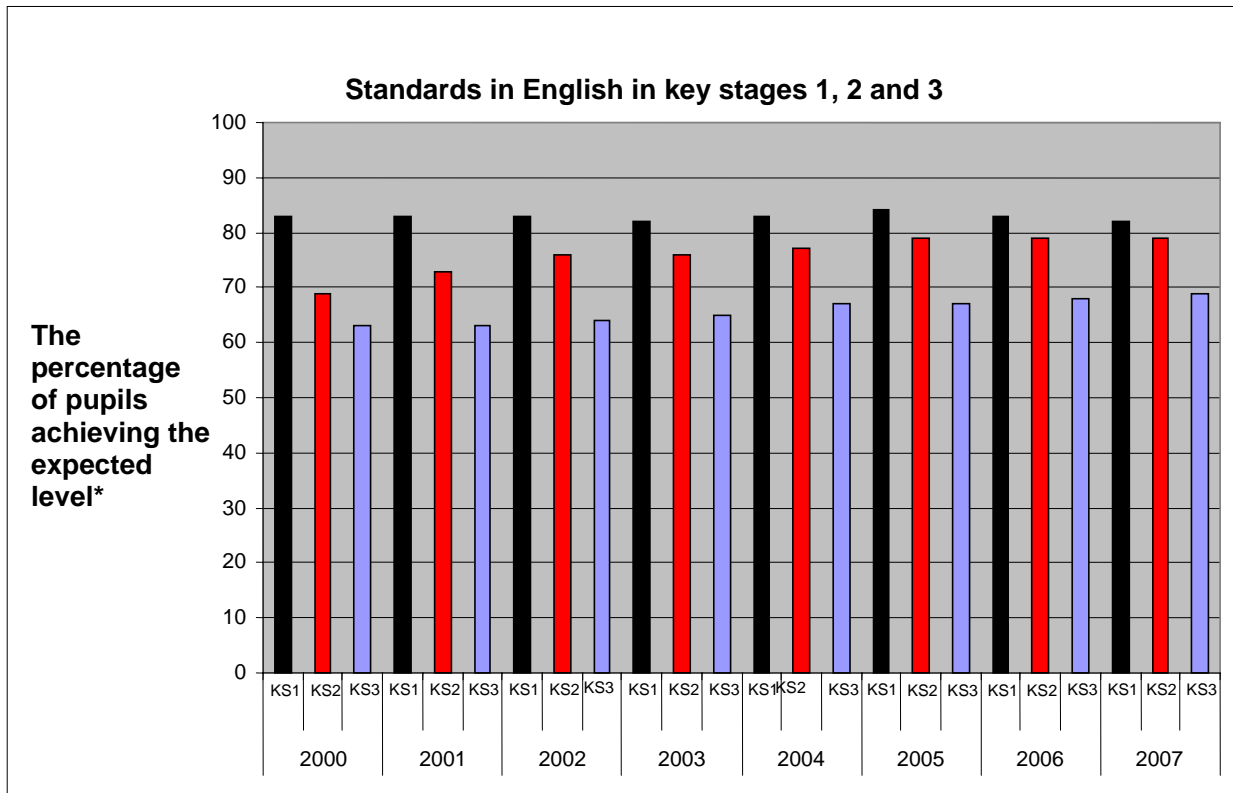
Tables 1 and 2 below show the percentage of pupils achieving the expected levels in Welsh and English between 2000 and 2007.

**Table 1**



\* The expected level for key stage 1 is level 2, for key stage 2 is level 4 and for key stage 3 is level 5

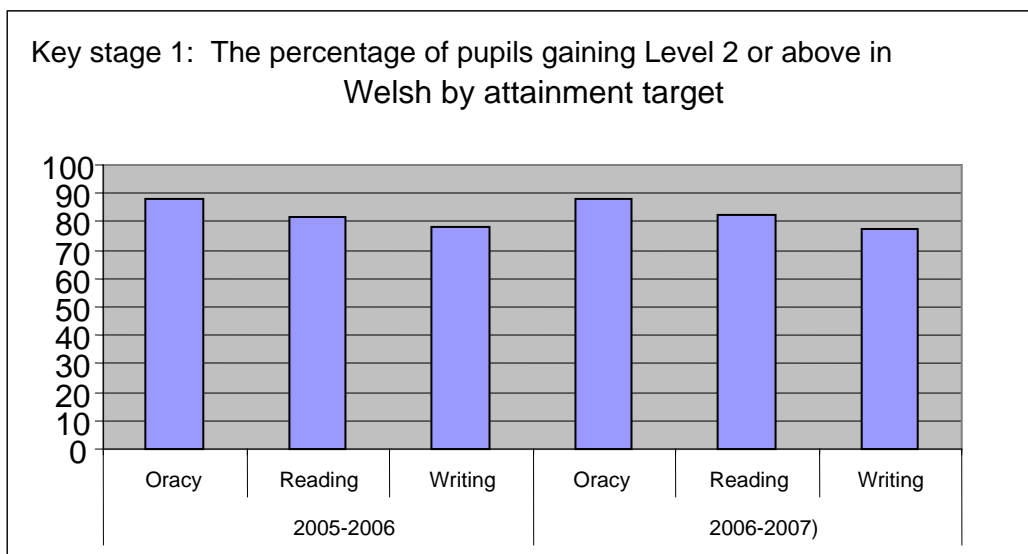
**Table 2**



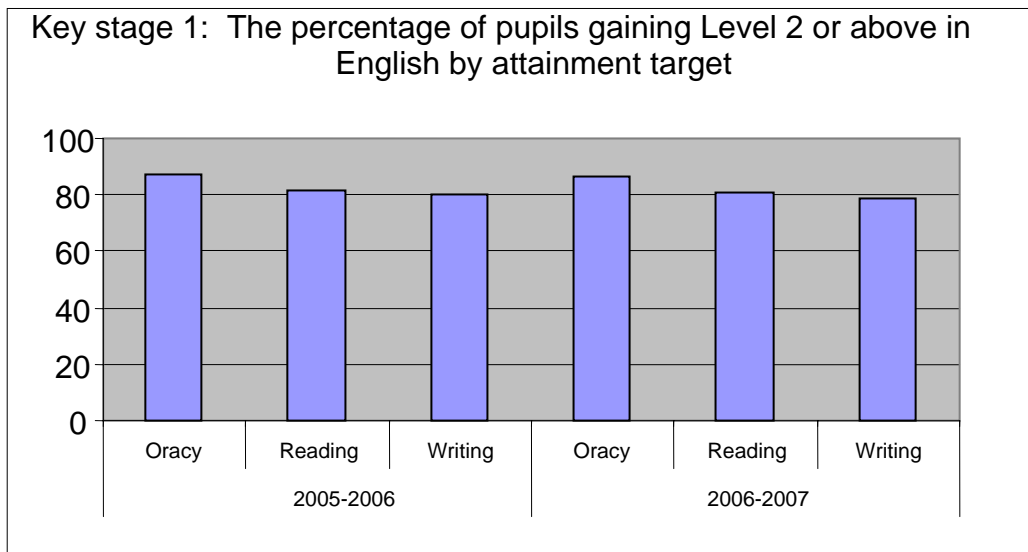
\* The expected level for key stage 1 is level 2, for key stage 2 is level 4 and for key stage 3 is level 5

In key stage 1, National Curriculum results in Welsh and English show that pupils achieve higher standards in oracy than in reading or writing. Tables 3 and 4 below, show that pupils achieve less well in writing than they do in reading and less well in reading than they do in oracy. Standards in writing are around 10 percentage points below standards of oracy and up to four percentage points below standards of reading in Welsh and English.

**Table 3**

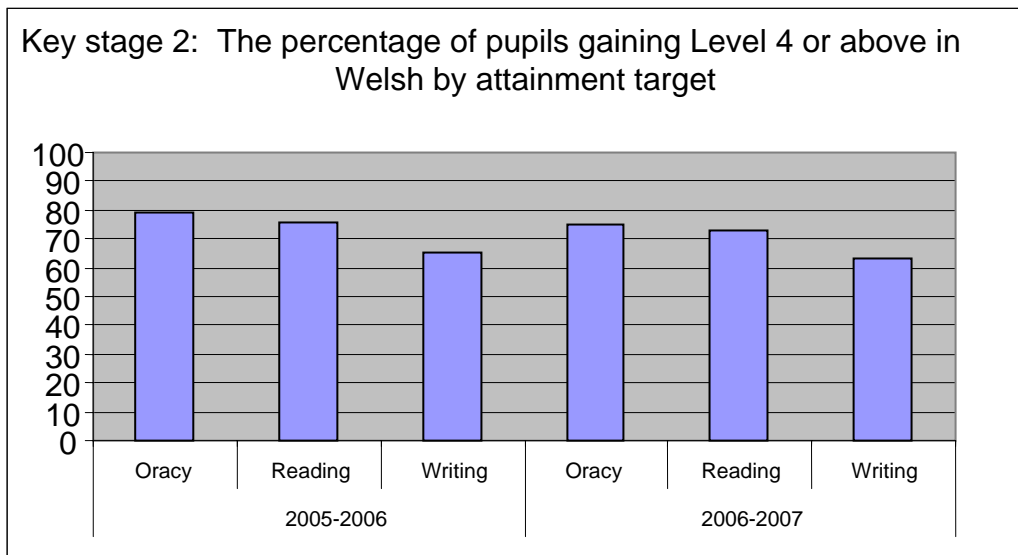


**Table 4**

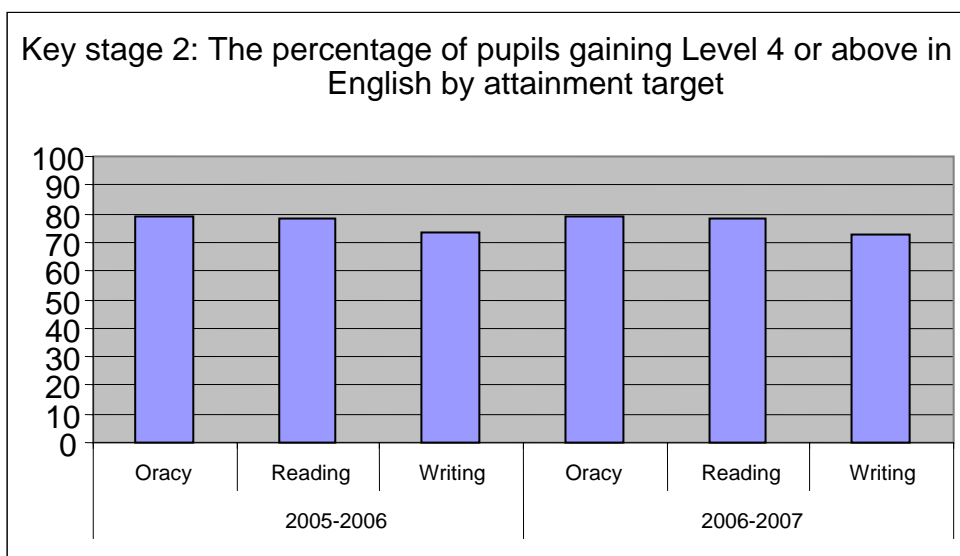


In key stage 2, the standard of pupils' reading achievement is broadly similar to standards of oracy in Welsh and English. This information is shown in tables 5 and 6 below. Despite pupils' greater maturity in developing their writing skills during this key stage, the difference between standards of pupils' reading and writing in both Welsh and English increases. Pupils' standards of writing are around ten percentage points lower in Welsh and five percentage points lower in English than they are for reading.

**Table 5**



**Table 6**

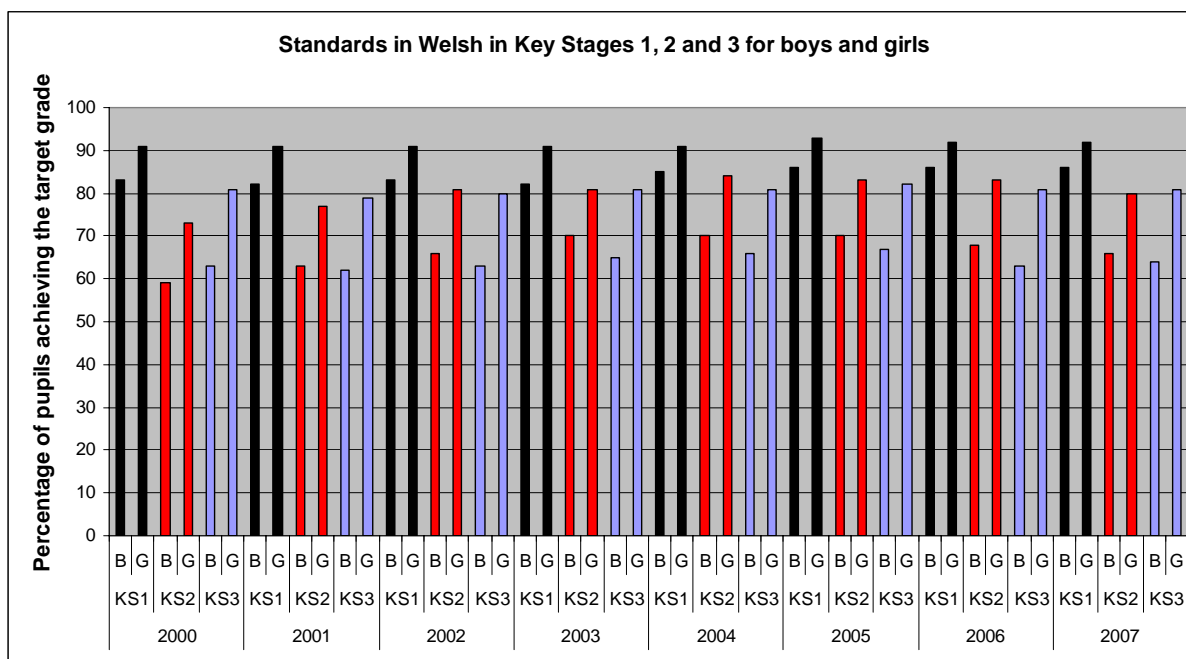


It is not possible to show the standards that boys and girls achieve in oracy, reading and writing in key stage 3, because data is published at a subject level and not by attainment target.

### The performance of boys and girls

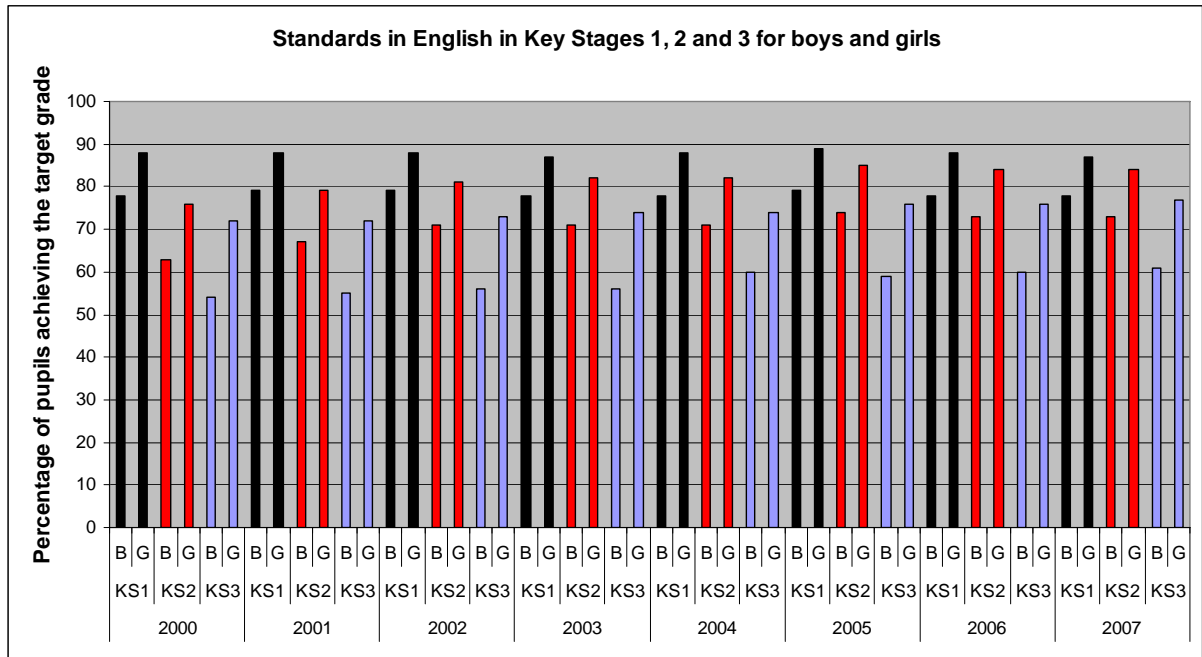
Tables 7 and 8 below show the standards that boys and girls achieve in key stages 1, 2 and 3 from 2000 to 2007. Boys continue to achieve less well than girls in almost all subjects in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations in key stage 4.

**Table 7**



\* The target grade for key stage 1 is level 2, for key stage 2 is level 4 and for key stage 3 is level 5

**Table 8**



\* The target grade for key stage 1 is level 2, for key stage 2 is level 4 and for key stage 3 is level 5