



English language and literacy in settings and primary schools

How English-medium settings and primary schools develop learners' English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills

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Foreword

This compendium of thematic reports and supplementary materials describes practice that supports the successful development of learners' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in the language of the setting or school.

The **'Welsh language acquisition'** report provides an overview of how effectively Welsh-medium and bilingual settings and schools teach and support the acquisition and development of Welsh language skills of learners aged between three and eleven years.

The **'English language and literacy in settings and primary schools'** report identifies how effectively English-medium settings and schools in Wales support and teach English language and literacy to learners aged three to eleven.

We hope these reports will contribute to professional discussions in settings and schools about how to improve language and literacy teaching, and to support schools to prepare for the Languages, Literacy and Communication area of learning and experience (Welsh Government, 2019).

They encourage practitioners to consider the range of learning experiences they offer their learners and how they plan for skills development. Collaboration within and across schools on curriculum planning has increased in recent years and often brings significant benefits for teachers and learners. For example, primary teachers often share expertise and work across year groups and phases to plan specific projects, develop their thinking or try out new approaches to teaching language and literacy across the school.



This summary draws together common high-level themes and findings from the reports, and highlights important factors which influence language learning in Welsh-medium settings and schools and Welsh streams in bilingual providers, and in English-medium settings and schools. We encourage you to read and consider the examples of effective practice in both reports. This approach is a first step towards supporting leaders and practitioners to consider language learning and teaching within the context of developing the *Curriculum for Wales* (Welsh Government, 2020b) and our national ambition to enable all learners to gain knowledge and skills in Welsh, English and international languages.

While the fieldwork for the reports was carried out prior to the emergence of the pandemic, we hope that the key messages, cameos and case studies in the reports will support schools to improve their teaching, and to work in partnership with families and communities, to ensure that all learners make strong progress in language and literacy.

Executive Summary

Learning and attitudes to learning

In settings and nursery classes, most children make strong progress and develop their language and literacy skills effectively.

As learners move through primary school, most continue to make sound or better progress in their language development from their different starting points, including those with special educational needs. Most learners from all linguistic backgrounds who attend Welsh-medium schools and Welsh streams in bilingual providers develop their skills successfully and have a sound grasp of the Welsh language by the end of their time in primary school.

In a minority of schools, learners who are more able do not achieve as well as they could. In general, in English-medium schools, boys do not attain as well as girls and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds do not make sufficient progress in developing their language and literacy skills. Despite improvements in aspects of speaking, reading and writing, standards of language and literacy in primary schools are broadly similar to those we reported five years ago.

Where standards of listening and speaking are strong, most learners interact well with practitioners and each other. They internalise, speak and apply language with increasing confidence to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts. In a few schools, a minority of key stage 2 learners do not develop their listening and speaking skills well enough.



By the end of the foundation phase, many learners achieve suitable fluency and expression in their reading. While many learners in key stage 2 use an increasing range of strategies to develop their comprehension when reading independently, they do not always develop a broad enough range of advanced reading skills. In Welsh-medium providers, a majority of learners do not discuss books and anthologies that were written in Welsh originally confidently enough. In general, in both Welsh and English-medium schools, learners' enjoyment in reading declines during their time in primary school.

In schools where standards of listening, speaking and reading are strong, learners use these skills to influence their writing across the curriculum. They develop these skills in literacy-rich activities and apply them in all areas of learning. In many schools, writing remains the weakest of the four language skills. In around a half of primary schools, learners' independent learning skills, especially in writing, remain areas for development.

In most settings and schools, learners have positive attitudes to developing language and literacy skills. Learners in Welsh-medium schools and in Welsh streams in bilingual providers appreciate the benefits of being proficient in both Welsh and English.

By the end of the foundation phase, many learners achieve suitable fluency and expression in their reading.



The learning environment and planning for learning

Many practitioners model language well to support the successful development of learners' speech and communication.

Settings and schools often create language and literacy-rich learning environments. Learners' language and literacy skills are often developed best in those schools and settings that adopt an integrated or carefully considered thematic approach. In preparing for *A Curriculum for Wales* (Welsh Government, 2020b), many primary schools use a wide range of engaging real-life and imaginative contexts to develop or extend learners' language and literacy skills. Where language teaching is highly successful, teachers plan explicitly for learners' vocabulary knowledge, as a distinct aspect of language learning.

In a minority of schools, planning for learning is underdeveloped. For example, in English-medium settings or schools it is not informed well enough by evidence and research. In Welsh-medium settings and schools and Welsh streams in bilingual providers, planning does not support learners well enough as they move between classes and phases.

Where there are shortcomings in language teaching in both Welsh-medium and English-medium providers, staff do not recognise the importance of learners developing their vocabulary knowledge when planning for learning, or provide them with explicit opportunities to do so. This limits the progress that learners make, such as improving the quality of their writing in Welsh-medium provision and developing their reading comprehension in English-medium schools.

Teaching and assessment

In most schools, teachers ensure that learners have an appropriate understanding of what they will be learning in their language lessons. Many schools provide clear, helpful feedback to support learners in improving their language and literacy work.

Many practitioners are strong language role models who immerse learners in spoken and written language. In most Welsh-medium settings and schools and Welsh streams in bilingual providers, practitioners support learners successfully to be confident and proficient bilingual learners.

In a few English-medium settings and schools, teachers do not question learners carefully enough to scaffold and progress their language and literacy skills as well as they could.

In a few of Welsh-medium or bilingual providers, practitioners do not always understand how immersion practices support learners to acquire language. In a minority of providers, practitioners do not provide enough challenge for learners with a high level of Welsh.





Listening and speaking

Most settings and schools develop learners' listening and speaking skills successfully in the foundation phase.

Where appropriate, practitioners support learners' early understanding of language by modelling and demonstrating a gesture or movement that conveys the meaning of words.

- Many schools provide beneficial extra-curricular opportunities, including within the local community, for learners to develop their language skills.
- The most effective primary schools use rich and varied contexts, such as participating in the Urdd, to teach learners specifically how to listen and talk.
- Provision is usually less effective when listening and speaking are considered skills that support reading and writing, rather than as skills to be developed in their own right.

Reading

Most schools plan appropriately for progression in learners' reading development and they teach reading daily.

- There is often a strong focus on developing learners' pre-reading skills in non-maintained settings and nursery classes, for example through songs, rhyme and music.
- Fostering a love of reading and literature is a priority in schools that develop learners' language and literacy effectively. They develop successful whole-school strategies for promoting reading for pleasure: reading to learners, providing opportunities for learners to read aloud, sharing complete novels with learners, and providing time for daily independent reading. Their teachers are advocates for reading.
- Many practitioners in Welsh-medium and bilingual providers develop learners' translinguaging skills effectively to support their reading across the curriculum.
- In those providers where learners do not develop their reading skills well enough, it is often because practitioners stick too rigidly to a reading scheme that stifles learners' enjoyment, or there is no whole-school strategy to improve decoding skills, build vocabulary knowledge, or develop learners' responses to what they read.
- In a few English-medium schools, staff do not take sufficient account of learners' developmental stages and introduce phonics teaching too early. They do not encourage disadvantaged learners and their families to enjoy reading well enough.
- Shortcomings in supporting learners' reading include few opportunities for adults to role-model reading in key stage 2, including Welsh literature in Welsh-medium provision.





Writing

Many primary schools have improved the teaching of writing through consistent approaches to developing skills and a greater focus on grasping purpose and audience.

- Where writing is taught best, learners understand the conventions of form and genre, and of writing as a process. Increasingly, as they consider the new curriculum, teachers provide learners with a real reason to write and audience to write for.
- In a few schools, shortcomings in planning and the inconsistent use of teaching and learning strategies inhibit learners' writing development, for example in sentence construction, punctuation and spelling.
- In a few schools, the expectation of learners, including the more able, to write well in different, challenging forms is too low.
- Too often, teachers do not provide enough opportunities for learners to write freely using the range of writing skills that they already have. In general, the quality of extended writing opportunities and the expectation for learners to check, correct and re-draft their work remain far too variable.

Effective support for learners and their families

In most providers, sound partnership working helps many learners to make good progress in their language and literacy skills.

Relationships with parents and carers are usually positive. Many schools' support for learners with specific language, literacy and communication needs is planned carefully and delivered consistently, so that learners benefit accordingly.

Nevertheless, a few schools do not always plan and review language support programmes for learners with weak language skills or additional learning needs carefully enough.

Most English-medium settings and schools work well with external agencies to access support or guidance to enhance vulnerable and disadvantaged learners' language skills. In a very few settings and schools serving the most socially disadvantaged areas, the support and guidance for learners' language and literacy development are excellent. Yet, only a minority of English-medium schools focus well enough on all the factors that influence children's language development. Despite the funding that has been available to address this, in a majority of schools, poverty and disadvantage remain barriers to learners developing secure language and literacy skills.

In a minority of schools, specialist practitioners in language immersion centres support latecomers to Welsh-medium education successfully by sharing immersion methods and relevant resources. In the best practice, leaders work with local Welsh language initiatives and other national organisations to encourage and provide opportunities for parents who do not speak Welsh to learn the language. In a minority of Welsh-medium and bilingual schools, provision does not always ensure that more able learners and those from Welsh-speaking homes make sufficient progress in their use of the Welsh language.



Leadership

In settings and schools where standards of language and literacy are strong, leaders establish a clear vision and strategic approach to develop learners' language and literacy skills. They have high expectations of learners from all linguistic backgrounds.

Most settings and schools have appropriate leadership structures in place to support the co-ordination and development of their provision for language and literacy. Leaders develop a strong collaborative culture in which all practitioners have access to and benefit from the schools' collective knowledge about effective teaching and learning strategies to meet individual learners' language and linguistic needs. In the best practice, leaders ensure that practitioners are confident in their teaching strategies, such as the immersion methodology of acquiring a language in Welsh-medium settings and schools and Welsh-streams in bilingual providers.

In the best examples, leaders develop robust processes for reviewing the impact of teaching and learning experiences on learners' progress. Leaders use monitoring and evaluation activities purposefully to respond to subject-specific aspects of language teaching. Leaders invest in the skills and capabilities of their staff through high-quality professional learning that successfully develops practitioners' understanding of how best to plan and develop learners' language and literacy skills. In weaker schools, leaders do not always ensure that staff are supported well enough in being good language role models for learners.

In general, local authorities and regional consortia provide appropriate support to settings and schools to build their capacity and expertise in language and literacy. Where there are shortcomings, training and support are often generic and are not always personalised sufficiently or matched to individual schools' needs.





Introduction

This report is in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Minister for Education’s annual remit letter to Estyn for 2019-2020.

The report identifies how effectively English-medium settings and schools in Wales support and teach English language and literacy to learners aged three to eleven. The report does not consider language and literacy development for learners with English as an additional language specifically.

The report will be of interest to teachers and headteachers, non-maintained setting practitioners and leaders, and officers in local authorities, regional consortia, and the Welsh Government. It will also be of interest to those working in initial teacher education. The report’s findings will help settings and schools planning for the Languages, Literacy and Communication area of learning and experience in *A Curriculum for Wales* (Welsh Government, 2020b). The report provides short descriptions of effective practice (‘vignettes’) to illustrate how providers develop learners’ skills and knowledge in listening, speaking, reading and writing. We elaborate upon these examples of successful practice in case studies published to accompany this report. These supplementary materials also include prompts to support professional learning activities.

The report will be of interest to teachers and headteachers, non-maintained setting practitioners and leaders, and officers in local authorities, regional consortia, and the Welsh Government.





For the purpose of this report, **language acquisition** is defined as the implicit learning that takes place when language is experienced in context. Generally, we acquire our first language through social interaction, without awareness of what is being learned. Through exposure, we become acquainted with the structures and elements of language, such as grammar, parts of speech and vocabulary. **Language learning** refers to the explicit and intentional learning and teaching that takes place to develop the language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Literacy and language are related closely. In Wales, **literacy** refers to the skills that allow us to understand written and spoken language, to interpret what has been written or said, and to draw inferences from evidence. Literacy also refers to the ability to communicate fluently, cogently and persuasively. In *A Curriculum for Wales*, developing learners' literacy will continue to be a cross-curricular responsibility for all teachers (Welsh Government, 2020b).

Background

In ‘Education in Wales: Our national mission action plan 2017-21’, the Minister for Education states, ‘Our national mission is to raise standards, reduce the attainment gap and deliver an education system that is a source of national pride and confidence’ (Welsh Government, 2017, p.3).

This will be achieved by delivering the new transformational curriculum, with a national goal that learners in Wales will have ‘relevant high-level’ literacy skills, developed through a teaching profession, which is research engaged, well informed and learns from excellence ‘at local, national and international levels’ (Welsh Government, 2017, p.11). In the update to ‘Our national mission’, the Welsh Government affirms how, taken together, continuing education reforms and the new curriculum will support young people to develop higher standards of literacy (Welsh Government, 2020a, p.15).

The *Curriculum for Wales* guidance (Welsh Government, 2020b) for Languages, Literacy and Communication sets out how the area of learning and experience supports the four purposes of the curriculum. As its main aim, it identifies supporting learning across the whole curriculum and enabling learners to gain knowledge and skills in Welsh, English and international languages, as well as in literature (Welsh Government, 2020b, p.126).

Children in Wales enter nursery¹ or reception classes with widely differing language experience and vocabularies, depending on the learning environments experienced at home and in childcare settings. The relationship between listening and speech development is critical in the early years of a child’s life. Listening is a receptive skill that develops first. Hart and Risley’s landmark study (1995) identified ‘remarkable differences’ in the early English

¹ Throughout the report, ‘nursery class’ refers to nursery-aged pupils in schools and non-maintained settings.

vocabulary experiences of young children². By age 3, children from affluent families knew, on average, 600 words more than children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Hart and Risley, 2003). Also, they knew a greater number of word meanings and more about each word's meaning. By age 10 or 11, this gap had widened to an average of around 4,000 words (Biemiller and Slonim, 2001).

Where children's home and school language are the same, research shows that their language ability also remains at the same high or low level once they start school. The evidence from longitudinal studies suggests that children who begin school with stronger vocabulary and spoken grammatical skills, developed in their home environment or in early years' settings, fare better in learning to read successfully (Muter *et al.*, 2004).

The nature of reading has evolved significantly over the past decade with the growing influence and rapid evolution of technology. Learners obtain information from a wide range of sources when using digital search engines. They need to be able to identify which of these are accurate, true and relevant and which are not. Reading literacy requires the use of analysis, synthesis, integration and interpretation of relevant information from multiple sources (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019a, p.32). The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2018 tests showed that learners' overall reading score improved and for the first time was close to the OECD average. Despite this improvement, learners in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland continue to perform better than those in Wales (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019b).



² This research refers to children who speak only one language from different socio-economic backgrounds.

The most recent National Literacy Trust report (Clark and Teravainen-Goff, 2019) includes the worrying message that children and young people's levels of reading enjoyment, particularly those of boys and those eligible for free school meals, are at their lowest since 2013. Recent evidence questions whether scrolling on electronic devices is having a negative effect on the development of learners' reading, and their reading for pleasure (for example, Munzer *et al.*, 2019; Quigley, 2020).

Often, listening remains overlooked in language teaching despite a growing body of research which shows that listening skills can be taught and improved (O'Malley, Chamot and Küpper, 1989; Oxford, 1990; Rubin and Thompson, 1994). Similarly, writing has attracted less attention from researchers than speaking and reading. The Confederation of Business Industry refers to communication and literacy in its definition of employability skills. This includes the ability to 'apply literacy' and 'the ability to produce 'clear, structured written work and oral literacy, including listening and questioning' (Confederation of Business Industry, 2011, p.23). We know employers want to recruit young people who listen effectively, are skilled communicators (in spoken language and in writing), and who work well with others to discuss complex ideas and solve problems creatively. The successful development of language and literacy, on which so many other skills depend, is essential for young people to make the effective transition into working life.

Research identifies that language difficulties are more prevalent in socially disadvantaged communities and, as the level of disadvantage increases, so does the number of children experiencing those difficulties (Basit *et al.*, 2015; Law, McBean and Rush, 2011; Locke, Ginsborg and Peers, 2002). Recent studies suggest that the rate of progress of a child's early language development, and the severity and persistence of their language difficulties, may be indicative of their longer-term academic outcomes (Määttä *et al.*, 2016; Snowling *et al.*, 2015; Zambrana *et al.*, 2014). It is important to note that there are children in the most socially disadvantaged groups who do not experience language difficulties and those in the most socially advantaged groups who do.

While learner attainment had risen overall in Wales before the COVID-19 pandemic, there had been limited progress in narrowing the gap for disadvantaged learners and in providing enough challenge for more able learners. The 2018-2019 Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training noted that in primary schools, despite improvements in aspects of literacy skills in the previous three years, standards of literacy overall remained broadly similar (Estyn, 2019, p.14). We reported similar standards in primary schools in 2019-2020 (Estyn, 2020a, p.15).

In April 2020, the United Nations published a report identifying the effects of the pandemic on children worldwide, including the loss of learning for children and young people, because of national school closures (United Nations, 2020). The risks to learners' development in such important skills as language and literacy are unprecedented. Despite the measures settings and schools in Wales took to support learners to engage with language and literacy learning during the crisis, many learners will have gaps in their knowledge, understanding and skills. This disruption has increased the risk of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners falling even further behind their peers. In addition, many young children have missed out on important learning opportunities in nursery education to develop their early language skills.

Consequently, reducing the impact of disadvantage on learners' progress and attainment in language and literacy, and ensuring that the teaching of literacy meets the needs of more able learners, remain priorities for all non-maintained settings, nursery and primary schools in Wales. In addition, addressing gaps in learning, as a result of the pandemic, also presents a significant challenge.



Main findings



Learning and attitudes to learning

- 1** In settings, most children make strong progress from their starting points and develop their language and literacy skills effectively.
- 2** Despite improvements in aspects of speaking, reading and writing, standards of language and literacy in primary schools are broadly similar to those we reported five years ago. In general, most learners with special educational needs make sound or better progress in their language development. In a minority of schools, learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and learners who are more able do not make sufficient progress in developing their language and literacy skills. Generally, boys do not achieve as well as girls.
- 3** In schools where standards of listening, speaking and reading are strong, learners use these skills well to influence their writing across the curriculum. The standard of learners' writing in many primary schools remains the weakest of the four language skills.
- 4** In most settings and primary schools, learners have positive attitudes to developing language and literacy skills. However, learners' enjoyment in reading declines during their time in primary school. This is more prevalent among boys and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 5** In most schools, learners do not have enough opportunities or control over how or what they learn in their language and literacy lessons. In around a half of primary schools, learners' independent learning skills, such as the ability to transfer prior learning to new contexts, and to use strategies to support their own reading and spelling development, remain areas for development.



Provision

- 6** In many settings and schools, practitioners support children’s speech and communication well through effective modelling of language. They provide classrooms and communal areas that are language and literacy-rich learning environments that immerse learners in the spoken and written word.
- 7** The well-developed planning processes in many settings and schools combined with the judicious use of resources ensure that language concepts and skills build incrementally to support the successful development of learners’ English language and literacy. A minority of schools do not consider whether their planning and approaches to learning, for example for improving boys’ language and literacy skills, are informed well enough by evidence and research into effective practice.
- 8** Most schools adopt an integrated, usually text or topic-based, approach to planning listening, speaking, reading and writing to help learners to acquire and develop language. In the best practice, careful planning ensures that the development of one skill complements that of another. In response to Curriculum for Wales developments, many primary schools use a wide range of engaging real-life and imaginative contexts to develop or extend learners’ language and literacy skills. They design purposeful opportunities for learners to apply their skills across the curriculum.
- 9** In most schools, teachers ensure that learners have an appropriate understanding of what they will be learning in their language lessons. In many schools, staff use verbal and written feedback well to ensure that learners understand their strengths and how to improve their language capabilities. In a few schools, teachers do not question learners carefully enough to scaffold and progress their language and literacy skills as well as they could.



- 10** Most settings and schools develop learners' listening and speaking skills successfully in the foundation phase, often from low starting points. They use relevant experiences to stimulate learners' role-play and encourage them to speak and engage in conversation. Often, where provision is excellent, practitioners make extensive use of the local community to broaden learners' experiences and support their language learning.
- 11** The most effective primary schools use rich and varied contexts to teach learners specifically how to listen and talk. In key stage 2, they plan relevant learning experiences that help learners to think carefully and deliberately about the types of language that they hear and use, including when speaking publicly or performing. In less effective schools, listening and speaking are considered skills that support reading and writing, rather than as skills to be developed in their own right. In these schools, teachers do not always provide enough appropriately challenging and worthwhile opportunities to build on and extend learners' listening and speaking skills, particularly in key stage 2.

- 12** Most non-maintained settings and nursery classes in schools focus strongly on developing children’s pre-reading skills, for example through songs, rhyme and music. In a few schools, staff do not take sufficient account of learners’ developmental stages and introduce phonics teaching too early. Consequently, learners with underdeveloped language and communication skills struggle to make the link between letters and sounds.
- 13** Most primary schools plan appropriately for progression in learners’ reading development. Schools who develop reading effectively teach it daily. Many use suitable resources successfully to support their teaching, of phonics for example. Where learners do not improve their reading skills well enough, often this is because there is no whole-school strategy to improve learners’ decoding skills, build their vocabulary knowledge, or develop their responses to what they read.
- 14** Fostering a love of reading and literature is a priority in schools that develop learners’ language and literacy effectively. They develop successful whole-school strategies for promoting reading for pleasure: reading to learners, providing opportunities for learners to read aloud, sharing complete novels with learners, and providing time for daily independent reading. Their teachers are advocates for reading.
- 15** In a minority of schools, there is limited opportunity for learners to listen to adults role-modelling reading in key stage 2, or to engage with more challenging fiction and non-fiction books. In general, too few teachers read new children’s literature themselves. A few schools do not explore a wide enough range of strategies to support disadvantaged learners and their families to access reading opportunities and to encourage enjoyment of reading.

Fostering a love of reading and literature is a priority in schools that develop learners’ language and literacy effectively.



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- 16** Many primary schools have improved teaching aspects of writing through a greater focus on learners' understanding of purpose and audience, and consistent approaches to developing their skills. The most successful schools offer exciting, relevant opportunities to write, provide effective feedback to guide further development, and teach the core skills of spelling and sentence construction explicitly.
- 17** The best teaching enables learners to understand the conventions of form and genre and of writing as a process. In a few schools, teachers' expectations of learners' writing, particularly those who are more able, are too low. Teachers do not provide enough opportunities for learners to write freely using the range of writing skills that they already have and this slows their progress. In general, the quality of extended writing opportunities and the expectation for learners to check, correct and re-draft their work remain far too variable.
- 18** In a very few schools, where language teaching is highly successful, teachers plan explicitly for learners' vocabulary knowledge, as a distinct aspect of language learning. They consider how best to integrate the careful selection of appropriate words into teaching and learning in meaningful contexts across the curriculum. In a minority of schools, staff do not have a secure enough understanding of the importance of teaching vocabulary knowledge to learners and the impact it has on their progress, particularly in reading.
- 19** Most settings and schools use information from suitable assessments appropriately to plan additional or specialist support for individuals and groups of learners. Many schools use interventions well to support learners of all ages to make good progress. A few schools do not always plan and review support programmes carefully enough. As a result, learners with weak language skills or additional learning needs do not make as much progress as they could.

- 20** In most providers, sound partnership working helps many learners to make good progress in their language and literacy skills. Relationships with parents and carers are usually positive and most settings and schools work well with external agencies to access support or guidance to enhance vulnerable and disadvantaged learners' language skills.
- 21** In a very few settings and schools serving the most socially disadvantaged areas, the support and guidance for learners' language and literacy development is excellent. The positive engagement between schools, families and communities is often a key component of this excellence. Currently, only a minority of schools focus well enough on addressing the broad range of factors that influence children's language development, such as parents, the home and the community environment. Despite the funding that has been available to address this, in a majority of schools, poverty and disadvantage remain barriers to learners' developing secure language and literacy skills.

Leadership

- 22** In settings and primary schools where standards of language and literacy are high for all learners, leaders establish a clear vision and strategic approach to developing learners' language and literacy. They make decisions that are right for their learners. While leaders are sensitive and mindful of learners' circumstances and situations, they do not use them to lower their expectations of what learners can achieve.
- 23** Most settings and schools have appropriate leadership structures in place to support the co-ordination and development of their provision for language and literacy. In settings and schools that are most successful in developing learners' skills, there is a clearly understood and co-ordinated strategy for doing so. Leaders ensure that staff provide exceptional teaching and learning that meet individual learners' needs. As a result, these schools address inequalities in learners' language and literacy effectively, and challenge and nurture the development of more able learners successfully.
- 24** In the most effective schools, leaders develop a strong collaborative culture where all staff have access to, and benefit from, the school's collective knowledge. Leaders often develop strong knowledge and expertise in language and literacy themselves. They invest in the skills and capabilities of their staff, through high-quality professional learning that develops successfully practitioners' understanding of how best to develop learners' English language and literacy skills.

In the most effective schools, leaders develop a strong collaborative culture where all staff have access to, and benefit from, the school's collective knowledge.



- 25** In the best examples, leaders develop robust processes for reviewing the impact of teaching and learning experiences on learners' progress. In weaker schools, leaders monitor generic aspects of teaching and do not focus closely enough on subject-specific aspects of language teaching. This makes it difficult to identify precisely professional learning needs so that staff are more able to develop learners' English language and literacy skills. In weaker schools, leaders do not always ensure that staff are good language role models for learners.
- 26** In general, local authorities and regional consortia provide appropriate support to settings and schools to build their capacity and expertise in English language and literacy. Where there are shortcomings in provision, the training and support are often generic and not always personalised sufficiently or matched to individual schools' needs.



Recommendations

● **Non-maintained settings, nursery and primary schools should:**

- R1** ensure that poverty and disadvantage are not barriers to learners developing secure language and literacy skills
 - R2** develop a culture of reading that encourages and enthuses all learners, including boys and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to read for pleasure and provide opportunities to listen to adults reading aloud
 - R3** develop explicitly learners' vocabulary knowledge so that it supports the development of their speaking, reading and writing skills
-

● **Primary schools should:**

- R4** develop a clear strategy to support the effective teaching of reading, including addressing learners' decoding skills, vocabulary development and advanced reading skills
 - R5** provide appropriately challenging and relevant opportunities to support the progressive development of learners' listening and speaking skills, particularly in key stage 2
 - R6** support the development of learners' writing skills through the explicit teaching of sentence construction, punctuation and spelling, relevant opportunities to write and precise feedback to guide further improvement
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● **Local authorities and regional consortia should:**

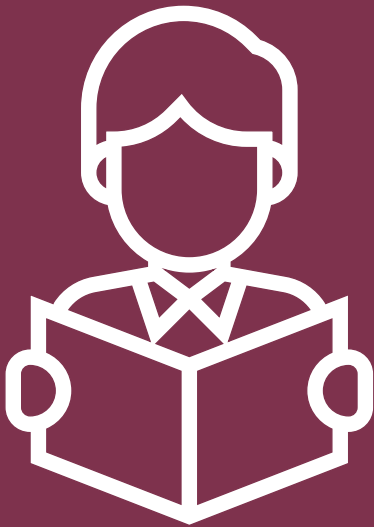
- R7** provide high-quality professional learning that meets the individual needs of settings and schools, to ensure that all learners, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, improve their language and literacy skills

● **The Welsh Government should:**

- R8** evaluate settings' and schools' use of targeted funding, such as the early years pupil development grant and the pupil development grant, to improve eligible learners' language and literacy skills
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Learning and attitudes to learning



Standards and progress in language and literacy

27 In primary schools, despite improvements in aspects of speaking, reading and writing, standards of language and literacy overall are broadly similar to those we reported four years ago (Estyn, 2019, p.14). In the very few schools where standards are excellent, all groups of learners make particularly strong progress in the development of their language and literacy skills. In general, most learners with special educational needs make sound or better progress in their language development from their starting points. In a minority of schools, learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and learners who are more able do not make sufficient progress over time in developing their language and literacy skills. Generally, boys do not achieve as well as girls.

Listening and speaking

28 In most settings and schools, learners make good progress in the development of their listening and speaking skills in the early years. Increasingly, settings and schools report lower levels of speech, language and communication skills for learners aged three and four, especially boys and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, when they start school in nursery and reception classes.

29 In settings and schools that serve areas with high levels of social deprivation, learners' listening and speaking skills are often far weaker than those of learners from more affluent backgrounds. With high-quality teaching and carefully targeted interventions, many of these learners make strong progress in developing their receptive and expressive language skills, from their low starting points. For example, many nursery-



aged children listen well to adults and their peers, especially when discussing stories and when following dance routines and action songs. They chat confidently to others as they play. While this progress is highly beneficial, the gap in learners' understanding and speaking, compared with their more advantaged peers, remains notable. Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds do not normally have as broad a range of vocabulary to draw upon as other learners, and this has longer-term implications for their learning and progress across the curriculum. In a majority of schools, the gap present in learners' knowledge and use of vocabulary at the end of the foundation phase remains in key stage 2.

- 30** By the end of the foundation phase, learners in most schools listen well. They sustain concentration to listen to and follow instructions, and they grasp most simple grammatical rules, using tenses, plurals and pronouns with increasing accuracy when speaking. They respond appropriately to questions from their teachers and to contributions from their peers. In a very few schools, where standards of listening and speaking are excellent, nearly all learners discuss issues confidently in front of their peers and respond to each other maturely with an extended range of vocabulary. For example, Year 2 learners use intonation, gesture and pace highly effectively to engage their audience during a group presentation. Those who are more able refer to evidence skilfully to add weight to their argument, for example by using sentence starters, such as 'Experts believe...'

By the end of the foundation phase, learners in most schools listen well. They sustain concentration to listen to and follow instructions, and they grasp most simple grammatical rules, using tenses, plurals and pronouns with increasing accuracy when speaking.



- 31** Many learners build well on their listening and speaking skills as they move through key stage 2. In a very few highly effective schools, learners develop a rich, broad and diverse vocabulary. These learners use varied sentence structures and words precisely in formal and informal contexts to convey information, ideas and viewpoints maturely. For example, learners engage in extended dialogue with their teachers and peers to explore Lady Macbeth's influence over Macbeth after reading an excerpt from the play. In a few schools, a minority of learners do not develop their listening and speaking skills well enough. This is because learners do not make good enough progress in developing the full repertoire of skills, such as: debating, role playing, interviewing, exploring ideas. They do not build on other learners' comments during collaborative group tasks or extend their answers sufficiently in class discussions.

Reading

- 32** Most children in nursery settings and classes develop important 'pre-reading' skills and positive reading behaviours. For example, they treat books with respect and are aware of how to hold the book the right way up, turn the pages, and retell stories in their own words. Many develop phonological awareness through singing songs, chanting rhymes, listening to music, clapping rhythms, and playing word games. They recognise familiar letters of the alphabet, especially the initial letter of their names and this helps them when self-registering at the beginning of sessions or when choosing the correct place mat during snack time
- 33** Many learners develop a secure understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds, which helps them to progress their decoding skills well, as they move through the foundation phase. In a few schools, learners do not always have a secure enough awareness of rhyme, syllables, onset-rime and stress patterns in words, upon which to build their knowledge of phonemes. This means that they struggle to learn the sounds that make up words and make slow progress in decoding print.

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- 34** By the end of the foundation phase, many learners achieve appropriate fluency and expression when reading aloud. They read age-appropriate texts accurately, drawing on 'sight vocabulary' to read high-frequency words. Many use their knowledge of letter sounds and picture cues to help them read unfamiliar words. To a lesser degree, learners self-correct, using the strategies of re-reading and reading ahead, or adjust their reading pace, when tackling unfamiliar text. In a few schools, where learners' reading requires improvement, learners rely too heavily on adult support or a narrow range of strategies to help them decipher words. Even when learners have the skills to read a word aloud, their limited vocabulary knowledge means that they do not understand the word or appreciate how it contributes to the sentence or text as a whole.
- 35** In many schools, in the foundation phase, learners' early reading skills of understanding and responding to reading develop successfully alongside their technical decoding skills. For example, they express their responses to poems, stories and non-literary texts read to them and those that they read themselves, by identifying aspects they like. Many learners recall the main points of a narrative and discuss facts they have learned from non-fiction texts. They identify the features of reference books, such as the contents page, index and glossary. Many learners infer meaning from simple texts to predict what might happen next in a story or to suggest what a character might be thinking. In a very few schools, where standards of reading are particularly high, learners acquire more advanced reading skills. For example, more able learners in Year 2 provide lively responses to their reading to explain why a character experiences an emotion, supporting their view with reference to the text.
- 36** In a few schools, by the end of the foundation phase, learners' understanding of texts and language does not develop as well as it could. Often, this is because teachers do not expose learners to a wide enough range of texts and reading experiences or use a balanced approach to developing reading that integrates decoding and comprehension skills. In addition, learners' progress in developing their reading skills can be adversely affected by having to adhere rigidly to a set number of texts from a reading scheme.

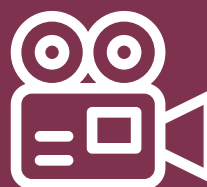


- 37** In many schools, learners become confident readers in key stage 2. They hone their ability to read aloud accurately, with awareness of their audience, paying good attention to punctuation, and varying intonation, voice and pace. In most schools, learners discuss books by their favourite authors competently and identify parts of stories that they find particularly appealing. They explain how they use source material to support their writing, for example of non-chronological reports in history and science.
- 38** As they progress through key stage 2, many learners develop their ability to infer meaning from a text, to skim a text to gain a general impression of its content and to scan to locate specific information. In the very few schools where nearly all learners have acquired advanced reading skills, learners have a strong understanding of authorial technique or style, recognising how writers use vocabulary and linguistic devices to achieve particular effects. For example, learners explain why writers use metaphors and similes to create tension in a novel. Generally, even in the most effective schools,

learners do not develop their ability to 'evaluate' texts as well as they progress other advanced reading skills. This is because learners do not always draw on their prior knowledge well enough or have broad enough social and cultural experiences to inform their thinking and to make judgements about what they read.

- 39** In key stage 2, many learners use an increasing range of strategies to develop their comprehension when reading independently. In the very best examples, learners have a strong understanding that there are different kinds of reading that are appropriate for different purposes and this influences the strategies a reader uses. For example, learners annotate a text to help them to identify key ideas or information when reading or generate their own questions before, during or after reading to help them to make sense of a text. They use their research skills to classify and summarise information, to make notes and to present facts in a different format, such as a flowchart. They have a 'language of learning' they can draw on helpfully to talk about the reading processes and strategies they use. In a few schools, an overuse of worksheets with limited challenge or opportunity to elicit depth of understanding hinders learners' progress in developing good reading comprehension.
- 40** In a very few schools, learners develop their reading of images as well as text, for example through engaging with multimedia texts such as picture books, web pages, animations and films. However, currently, learners' ability to apply advanced reading skills to interpret text and images from a range of media is underdeveloped.

In a very few schools, learners develop their reading of images as well as text, for example through engaging with multimedia texts such as picture books, web pages, animations and films.



Writing

- 41** Most nursery-aged children in settings and schools enjoy mark making and experiment confidently using a range of tools and equipment, for instance when creating pictures to illustrate ducklings hatching from eggs or when creating self-portraits with colouring pencils. They show a good understanding of the purpose of writing, such as when making signs for selling plants in their garden centre, writing customer orders in their café, or creating 'danger keep out' signs for their building site. Many show increasing control of writing tools and make good attempts to form letters from their name. More able children write recognisable letters clearly.
- 42** During the foundation phase, many learners progress to writing initial and end sounds to represent words successfully, before moving on to writing whole words and sentences. By Year 2, a majority develop the physical skills involved in writing, such as co-ordination, posture and stamina to develop a fluent handwriting style. However, a minority of learners' slow transcription hinders their compositions, as they concentrate more on their handwriting and spelling and are less able to think about the content of their writing.
- 43** By the end of the foundation phase, learners in most schools have experience of writing for a suitable range of purposes and audiences. Many learners' writing has a sound structure. They use a suitable range of sentence starters to organise their ideas successfully and they use vocabulary that is appropriate for the genre. For example, they use interesting similes to describe animals in stories and use persuasive language when writing applications for jobs in the fire service. Most learners spell most common words correctly and their attempts at spelling polysyllabic words are usually phonetically plausible. Many learners punctuate their writing accurately with capital letters, full stops and exclamation marks. Generally, they are less secure in using question marks and in demarcating speech. In a few schools, learners are overly reliant on adult support when writing and struggle to write at length. In schools where standards of writing are adequate and require improvement, learners do not use an imaginative or wide range of

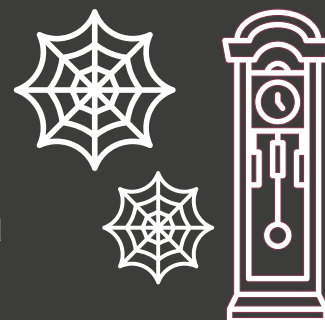
vocabulary. As a result, their writing does not capture or sustain the reader's interest well enough.

- 44** In key stage 2, most learners develop a strong understanding of the purpose of their written work and organise their writing well. Many develop a neat, legible and cursive style of handwriting. Many spell words they use frequently in their writing correctly. Where standards are good or better, learners write lively, extended pieces in a wide variety of genres and use a range of punctuation accurately, such as colons, brackets and apostrophes to show contractions. They combine simple sentences with varied, multi-clause sentences of different types to engage the reader. In a minority of schools where there are shortcomings in learners' writing, learners do not make enough progress in addressing basic and repeated errors in spelling and punctuation, as they move through key stage 2. Generally, in many schools, learners do not have a good enough understanding of the history of words and the relationships between them to support their spelling of more complex, polysyllabic words and their vocabulary knowledge.
- 45** In a very few schools, standards in writing by the end of key stage 2 are particularly high, with more able learners producing skilfully planned and structured compositions, and using punctuation proficiently to create specific effects. For instance, they use commas to increase the pace of a story or to include special details about characters or settings. Their writing contains a wealth of adventurous vocabulary to engage the reader, create descriptions and convey emotions. They have an excellent command of how to use powerful adjectives, adverbial phrases and figurative language, such as personification in their descriptive writing. For example, in their narrative poems and stories, Year 6 learners write:

'The sea is a bloodthirsty bear
His unforgiving roar echoes along the wall of the coast
His enormous paws ruthlessly swiping and clawing at waves
Whilst his terrible teeth chew at the shore.'



'Standing tall and proud, a senile grandfather clock,
festooning in cobwebs,
rhythmically ticked away the years in one forgotten corner,
while a diminutive, cylindrical oil lamp delicately suspended
itself off an ornately coiled hook on the wall.'



However, learners who write well towards the end of key stage 2 often struggle to know how to extend their skills further, for example to experiment with the characteristics of different forms of writing, and remain at the same level for too long.

- 46** In a minority of schools, learners develop useful editorial skills that help them to improve the quality of their work, for instance in response to teachers' feedback. However, this is not common practice, even in good schools. Often, learners' editorial work is limited to correcting spellings or amending basic grammatical errors. In general, learners' ability to use a keyboard to write successfully in the foundation phase and to use information and communication technology to support effective redrafting in key stage 2 is highly variable within and across schools.
- 47** Overall, the standard of learners' writing in many primary schools remains weaker than other aspects of their literacy. This is due in part to not securing learners' skills in listening, speaking and reading well enough to support their writing development.

Application of skills across the curriculum

- 48** Where schools use effective teaching and learning strategies in the foundation phase, this has a positive impact on developing learners' listening and speaking skills. This provides a robust foundation for progressing their reading and writing, when developmentally appropriate, and for learners to use their language and literacy skills confidently across the curriculum. In a minority of schools, where activities in the foundation phase are adult-directed for most of the time, there are not enough opportunities for learners to explore language across areas of learning by talking to adults and other learners about topics that interest them. By Year 6, many learners use their speaking skills well to support their learning in all subjects, contributing purposefully to presentations and performances, but they do not always advance their skills as well as they could to discuss cause and effect, or to reason and argue.
- 49** Where standards of reading are good in settings and schools, teachers immerse learners in a learning environment that gives them numerous opportunities to read a variety of texts and to practise and improve their reading skills throughout the day. In most primary schools, learners begin to apply their reading skills to help them learn independently in subjects across the curriculum as they move into key stage 2. For instance, they skim and scan an information text efficiently to identify relevant facts to help with their report writing. In a minority of schools, learners do not make sufficient progress in their ability to analyse, synthesise and reorganise the ideas or information in texts, as they progress from year to year. This means that by the end of Year 6, they have not secured the skills necessary to collate and assimilate information appropriately and express this in their own words. Instead, they spend a long time copying out chunks of text. The limited vocabulary knowledge of a minority of learners means that they struggle to interpret technical terms or sustain their understanding when reading non-fiction texts to support their topic work.

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- 50** In those schools where standards of listening, speaking and reading are strong, learners use these skills well to influence their writing in literacy lessons and across the curriculum. In the majority of schools where learners have meaningful opportunities to write for a variety of purposes in the foundation phase, most learners develop confidence in transferring their understanding of the different forms of writing to other areas of learning. In a few schools, younger learners do not apply their writing skills across the curriculum well enough. Teachers do not provide stimulating opportunities for writing during continuous and enhanced provision, limiting learners' ability to write at length imaginatively and independently. In key stage 2, there is often an over reliance on formal teaching and the use of worksheets or writing frames, to scaffold learners' writing for too long or for learners who do not need this support. As a result, a minority of learners do not develop the ability to write creatively and at length.
- 51** In the very few schools where the standard of learners' writing is excellent, most learners apply their understanding of the features of a range of genres exceptionally well to their own writing in other subjects across the curriculum. For example, Year 6 learners manipulate the features of a non-chronological report skilfully to produce highly engaging scientific reports on vertebrates and invertebrates with imaginative titles, such as 'Salamander: A poisonous predator or a genetic magician?' and 'The Giant Tiger Centipede: Poisonous problem or nature's vacuum cleaner?' They write clearly and imaginatively using an impressive range of mature vocabulary. These learners are ambitious in their use of language in all contexts for writing and not just in their English lessons.

Attitudes to learning

- 52** In most settings and primary schools, learners have positive attitudes to developing their language and literacy skills. Younger learners enjoy playing with language through songs, rhymes and games, and most participate enthusiastically in their activities. Nursery-aged learners enjoy listening to stories and many choose books from the reading corner or an outdoor book tent to share with friends. In the very few settings and schools where standards are excellent, most nursery children show genuine pleasure in books and stories, recounting and discussing main events and characters with confidence and maturity.
- 53** In key stage 2, learners in most schools are keen to talk about the range of language activities they enjoy, for example:

- developing their speaking and creative skills through drama
- taking part in public speaking and debating societies
- reading challenging novels
- visiting the theatre and the Hay Festival
- writing humorous versions of well-known stories
- writing on a subject of their choice in a genre of their choice
- working with authors in writers' squads
- having stimulating practical experiences to support their language experiences

Many learners explain how activities such as these have helped them to develop their skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing.

- 54** In a very few schools, older learners reflect maturely on their own and others' language learning. For example, a group of Year 5 and 6 learners talk about 'internal and external barriers' to improving their language skills. They reflect on the important role parents play in encouraging their children to read at home and they express how some learners might be afraid to ask what a word means because of the 'fear of looking stupid' in front of their peers. They talk wisely about the importance of teachers fostering an open culture where it is acknowledged that everyone is 'a learner', including the teacher. They are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and they motivate themselves to take responsibility for improving their learning. Common to these highly effective schools is learners' perception that their teachers encourage them to be creative in their language work and to take risks in their learning.
- 55** Where schools have established a successful culture of reading for learning and for pleasure, most learners continue to derive enjoyment from a diverse range of reading materials as they progress through the primary school. They make independent choices from classroom, school and community libraries and enjoy sharing book recommendations in their areas of interest with their peers and teachers. They take pleasure in having time for reading in school in quiet, comfortable places. In many schools, learners reap the benefits that reading can bring. However, in a minority of schools, there are groups of learners who become reluctant readers for a variety of reasons. These include:

- difficulties with reading
- low self-esteem and self-confidence as a reader
- a lack of parental engagement
- not understanding the benefits and importance of reading
- a lack of resilience to read chapter books or novels
- a lack of interest in the reading resources the school has
- a preference to do other things in their leisure time

Generally, fewer learners enjoy reading in the primary school than in the past (Estyn, 2019; Clark and Teravainen-Goff, 2020). This is more prevalent among boys and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- 56** In a very few schools, learners use writing journals effectively. These help to foster their independence in writing and improve their motivation to write. However, in most schools, learners generally do not have enough control over how or what they learn in their language and literacy lessons. For example, they do not routinely select how they would like to present their work.
- 57** In around a half of primary schools, learners' independent learning skills, such as the ability to transfer prior learning to new contexts, remain an area for development. Even in the best schools, where learners achieve high standards of listening, speaking, reading and writing, learners do not always develop their metacognitive skills well enough to use a wide range of learning strategies independently, and to monitor and evaluate their own learning, particularly when faced with a challenge. Please refer to **pages 147 to 149** for examples of how teachers promote and model the development of metacognitive strategies and the language of learning and thinking, when teaching reading.





Provision



The learning environment and planning for learning

- 58** Many settings and schools have classrooms and communal areas that are language and literacy-rich learning environments, which immerse pupils in the spoken and written word, and where practitioners support children's speech and communication well through effective modelling of language.
- 59** In these examples, there are often warm, inviting spaces, where children can choose from a range of high-quality reading materials. Most have helpful vocabulary 'walls' or displays with sentence patterns to support the development of learners' speaking, reading and writing. In a few schools, learners contribute frequently to these 'live' learning walls to support their own learning and that of their peers. In many non-maintained settings and nursery classes, staff use displays of vocabulary, Makaton signs and picture cues well to support children to access resources independently.
- 60** In the few best examples, attractive displays of learners' writing, showing the progression in learners' skills as they move through primary school, feature prominently. These include emergent writing from the reception class through to extended, sophisticated pieces of prose and poetry from Year 6.
- 61** Where provision is most effective, there are numerous opportunities for pupils to develop their language and literacy skills through continuous and enhanced provision, such as indoor and outdoor role play areas in the foundation phase, and independent learning 'zones' in key stage 2 classrooms. A very few schools plan innovative use of their forest school area to develop learners' listening and speaking skills to a high standard. **The case study on Pembrey Community Primary School on pages 123 to 125 illustrates how they achieve this.**





In one school, teachers create helpful learning zones, as part of a common approach to organising classrooms and outdoor areas to support learners' independent language learning skills.

Taking their stage of language development into account, teachers provide learners with access to a wide range of resources. They ensure that learners understand the success criteria for learning tasks and challenge them to check their progress independently. The support for language features strongly across other zones, as well as in the language zone, where there is support for vocabulary, spelling and sentence structures, writing scaffolds and individualised learner targets.

Learners in key stage 2 benefit from carefully-crafted cross-curricular indoor and outdoor literacy ‘missions’, which are led by teachers and teaching assistants, as well as directed by the learners themselves.

Teachers provide challenge at an appropriate level when designing these missions. They develop learners’ ability to organise and manage their language learning effectively and independently. For example, learners use a wide range of materials confidently, including whiteboards, flipcharts and apps to plan and record their learning. They check their progress against the success criteria regularly, without teacher support. As a result, most have highly developed planning and research skills.

Learners in Pembrey Community Primary School develop their listening, speaking and writing skills successfully in purposeful, language-rich contexts.

Teachers plan exciting learning experiences in the outdoors that capture older learners’ imagination. For example, they explore oral traditions of storytelling, poetry and rhyme in the context of a local Welsh legend on Cefn Sidan beach and in the forest school. They use this as a stimulus for language learning across all curriculum areas, making purposeful links between Languages, Literacy and Communication and the Expressive Arts area of learning and experience. Performing in role helps to build learners’ confidence and support their writing effectively.



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- 62** Most non-maintained settings and nursery classes in schools plan effectively for children's early language development. This is particularly successful where they provide an experiential and active approach to learning, and take good account of child and language development theories.
- 63** Where planning for learning is strong, settings and schools prioritise the development of learners' listening and speaking skills in the foundation phase, as essential foundations for effective communication and the subsequent development of reading and writing. In the best provision, settings and schools use knowledge about children's typical language development to inform their planning for groups of learners and individuals with specific language needs. For example, they prioritise the development of learners' attention, listening, memory, visual and auditory discrimination and their receptive and expressive language skills.
- 64** In a few schools where planning for language and literacy is particularly strong, they maintain the focus on listening and learning to talk, as well as learning through talk, as pupils move through the school. They use the oracy strands of the current national curriculum programmes of study (Welsh Government, 2015a; 2015b), the literacy and numeracy framework (Welsh Government, 2013), and other useful resources to plan for explicit and systematic teaching of listening and speaking skills in key stage 2. However, schools generally do not plan enough relevant opportunities for older pupils to take part in learning experiences that focus specifically on talking, for example to improve their ability to question, challenge and build on the contributions of others through debate.
- 65** Most settings and schools adopt an integrated approach to help learners to acquire and develop language. In the best examples, staff plan carefully so that developments in one skill, for example speaking, can support and complement the development in another, such as writing. They enable learners to develop the full range of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills progressively, in meaningful and interesting contexts across the curriculum.

- 66 In most schools, the content of language and literacy lessons in key stage 2 is text-based. In 2008, in our publication, *Best practice in the reading and writing of pupils aged 7 to 14 years* (Estyn, 2008, p.16), we highlighted the importance of staff choosing high-quality texts because the quality of learners' own language is usually related directly to the quality of what they read and hear. In general, staff plan the use of texts written for different purposes and audiences well to provide relevant models for learners to develop their reading and writing skills. In a very few schools, there is not a good enough balance in curriculum planning between different text types and genres. This means that learners do not have sufficient experience of the structure and layout of a broad range of fiction and non-fiction texts, or wide enough exposure to different grammatical and stylistic features to support their skill development.
- 67 Schools where learners demonstrate consistently high standards of language and literacy often use a cross-curricular, topic-based approach. Teachers plan the development of skills carefully, linked to the literacy and numeracy framework (Welsh Government, 2013), to support learners' application of those skills across the curriculum. In these schools, in the foundation phase, there is a good balance of adult-directed focused activities and child-initiated independent learning. Teachers develop interesting enhanced and continuous learning activities to consolidate these skills further, according to the interests and abilities of the learners in their class. They provide appropriate opportunities for learners to make independent choices about their language learning.
- You can read more about the approaches taken by schools on pages 119 to 122**



Teachers have helped raise standards through improved planning using the literacy framework and well-resourced, discrete teaching of specific language and literacy skills.

Teachers develop their own curriculum map identifying clearly the literacy-rich opportunities for each year group, to allow learners to progress and deepen their understanding of language in their work across the curriculum. Staff collaborate well to ensure progression in skill development. For instance, they identify which vocabulary learners should experience through writing genres in each year group and build solidly upon learners' prior knowledge of the features of different types of texts.

Teachers from Mount Stuart Primary School in Cardiff Bay have organised the curriculum to ensure that learners acquire new vocabulary and have good opportunities to rehearse and refine its use in meaningful contexts.

They plan whole-school themes, such as 'heritage', and use the local area extensively for trips and visits that allow learners to extend and enhance their vocabulary, while exploring their locality. The benefits of these visits range from younger learners understanding how to order a meal in a restaurant, to older learners improving their writing about the importance of the local docks to the coal trade.

Learners at Ewloe Green Primary school benefit from focus weeks that offer them the opportunity to engage more deeply with an aspect of their learning in language and literacy, through experiential activities.

Learners from nursery to Year 6 focus on developing their vocabulary and creative writing skills through a detailed study of Shakespeare's plays and the Mabinogion. They develop characters and write a script based around these texts, which they perform for their peers. They engage enthusiastically in this exciting opportunity, creating their own literature that they are happy to perform and discuss.



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- 68** In a very few most effective schools, staff use literature as a stimulus for their curriculum topics or themes. This helps to ensure that planning of all learning opportunities is ‘language rich’ and provides plenty of meaningful contexts, within and across disciplines, for learners to develop their skills. In these schools, learners make a strong contribution to planning for language and literacy. For example, through literature-based ‘immersion’ days, they engage with a wide range of stimulating introductory activities linked to their class text, and then offer their suggestions about what and how they would like to learn. This is balanced with teachers’ professional judgement to ensure that learners cover the skills and knowledge they need, to make effective progress in all aspects of language and literacy.
- 69** Most schools make good use of a few well-known published literacy resources to support their planning for language learning, particularly for developing learners’ early reading skills and writing. In addition, settings and schools draw on helpful planning resources produced by literacy teams in local authorities or regional consortia, for example to support the development of learners’ spelling and reading comprehension.
- 70** Where planning for learning is most effective, settings and schools use published resources successfully to develop their own schemes of work, adapting the resources to meet the needs of their learners. In these instances, staff make judicious choices, which build and complement their existing effective approaches to language learning, as part of their whole-school teaching and learning strategy. They often use more than one resource, recognising shortcomings or gaps in individual developmental programmes.
- 71** In general, too few schools think critically about whether the resources and approaches they use to support their planning are informed well enough by evidence and research of effective practice. Consequently, older primary-aged pupils, particularly those who are more able, do not always benefit from a suitable range of approaches to extend their reading and writing skills.

Teaching and assessment

- 72** In the most effective non-maintained settings and nursery classes, practitioners combine developing children's language and communication skills through an appropriate balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities, with a strong understanding of child development. They use this understanding to plan tasks at an appropriate level and do not introduce children to new language concepts before they are ready or try to force their learning, for example by introducing children to letters through phonics teaching before they are at a suitable developmental stage.
- 73** Increasingly, in response to Curriculum for Wales developments, primary schools use a wide range of engaging real-life and imaginative contexts to develop or extend learners' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Teachers who have a strong understanding of how children develop language ensure that learners develop a thorough grasp of the purpose, intended audience, structure and language features of different forms of written texts and speech. They ensure that learners use these different forms in their language sessions and design purposeful opportunities for learners to apply their skills independently outside of language sessions.
- 74** In most schools, teachers ensure that learners have an appropriate understanding of what they will be learning and how this links to previous language and literacy activities. In many instances, they also ensure that learners develop a good understanding of how to be successful in their learning, for instance by providing effective models of different types of writing. In a few schools, teachers do not question learners carefully enough to scaffold and progress their language and literacy skills as well as they could. They



miss opportunities to engage individual learners in extended dialogue to elicit further thought and to support them to learn how to reason, discuss, argue, and explain.

- 75** In many schools, staff use verbal and written feedback well to ensure that learners understand their strengths and how to improve their language capabilities. In a majority of cases, they provide learners with worthwhile opportunities to respond meaningfully to staff, or peer, comments during activities or in subsequent lessons. In schools where feedback is most effective, teachers develop techniques that are purposeful and efficient, and do not result in them creating large amounts of written commentary that has limited impact on the progress learners make. In the best examples, teachers give learners feedback throughout the writing process and teach learners how to monitor their own progress towards their learning goals successfully. **You can read about the way Trinant Primary School does this on pages 153 to 154.**

Developing learners' listening and speaking skills

- 76** Most settings develop children's language and communication skills successfully through purposeful indoor and outdoor activities. Practitioners model language in role play well to support children's speech and to develop the building blocks of language, such as syntax and context. **You can read more about these practices on pages 132 to 140.**

In one nursery class, practitioners use creative play to support children's language development successfully.

They model language in role play well when pretending to board and fly an aeroplane. They introduce new related language and ask questions that encourage children to think for themselves. They assess learners' understanding of common prepositions, such as 'on', 'under', 'front' and 'behind'. Children learn to follow and give multi-step instructions, for instance when 'the flight attendant' asks the passengers to put their bags in the locker, sit down and fasten their seat belts.

Thoughtful, adult interaction benefits children's social and communication skills, as they learn to use eye contact, take turns and listen to each other.

Staff in this school make effective use of modelling language to provide authentic, practical support to develop young learners' spoken and written language.

They form helpful relationships with learners and introduce them gradually to relevant language, repeating key words, such as instructional language for cooking. To make up for many learners' narrow range of life experiences, they simulate different experiences, such as a visit to the seaside, using the school's outdoor environment. Learners benefit from one-to-one or small-group interactions to develop their receptive and expressive language skills and, for example, use these practical experiences to develop their own descriptive writing about the seaside.



Teachers at Woodlands Primary School recognise that the listening skills of a minority of children are underdeveloped when they start school.

Often, children do not have the skills to isolate sounds they hear in the environment or in words. Frequently, they focus on the last word of a sentence or instruction and base their response only on that one word. To support these children, the nursery class focuses on preliminary 'sound' work, such as copying simple patterns using clapping and musical instruments. This helps the children to detect and discriminate between sounds and provides the building blocks for the development of their speech, phonological awareness and reading.



- 77** In settings and schools with effective foundation phase practice, staff recognise that most learners from all backgrounds hear transactional language more than any other type of language at home and at school. For example, adults ask them questions such as, 'Have you brushed your teeth?' and give instructions such as, 'Put on your shoes'. They realise that learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, do not hear often enough the rich language of description and narrative that introduces them to new words or sentence patterns that help them to use a range of tenses. In these settings and schools, adults support them successfully to use pronouns, auxiliary verbs such as 'can', 'will' or 'might', and word endings, as in 'I have finished my drawing'. **You can find out about Ysgol Heulfan's highly structured approach to assessing and developing learners' listening and speaking skills when they start school on pages 137 to 139.**

A high proportion of learners have limited or no speech upon joining the nursery class at Ysgol Heulfan.

All staff in the foundation phase use basic sign language with learners throughout the day and the school provides sessions for parents on sign language through a Family and Community Engagement project that helps them understand how to support their children effectively. Gradually, staff introduce learners to a bilingual culture and when their speech becomes clear, and their understanding of vocabulary in English and Welsh is secure, staff stop using signs.

Older key stage 2 learners visit the nursery classes to help develop younger learners' communication skills. Through strategies, such as repetition and modelling and using other forms of communication, staff and key stage 2 learners support nursery children well to become familiar with the patterns and rhythms of both languages.

- 78** A common feature among settings with excellent provision is their extensive use of the local community to support language learning, by visiting places of interest and inviting visitors to share experiences with the children. **The examples of practice on pages 141 to 142 illustrate how settings and schools use the local area and its history to develop learners' listening and speaking skills successfully.**

Using the local area provides a rich context for developing young children's vocabulary and helps to widen the range of topics they can discuss.

Following the children's suggestion that they would like to learn about pirates, practitioners in a non-maintained setting arrange a trip to the local beach where the children dress up as pirates and describe their appearance. They travel on the local bus, greeting the driver and buying their tickets. They describe the shapes, texture and colours of the shells they collect, as well as 'walking the plank'! These experiences help the children to develop the structure of their spoken language, so that it begins to resemble adult-like sentences.



Teachers in a primary school use local history to develop learners' listening, speaking and writing skills.

In the theme 'Time Traveller', Year 5 learners travel back 50 years to a time when local residents opposed the Ministry of Defence's plans to turn Cefn Sidan beach into a gunnery range. Members of the local community visit the school to talk with learners and to answer their questions about these events. This provides a real-life context for them to develop the language of social interaction, to use appropriate conventions when interviewing, to select vocabulary for impact, and to provide convincing arguments and evidence to support a point of view when writing a protest speech.



- 79** The most effective primary schools use rich and varied contexts to teach learners ‘how’ to listen and talk. They plan relevant learning experiences that help learners to think carefully and deliberately about the types of language they hear and use. They support learners to express and structure their thoughts and ideas effectively for different purposes and audiences, including when speaking publicly or performing. **On pages 143 to 144, you can find out more about how Gaer Primary School develops older learners’ listening and speaking skills.**

Staff at Gaer Primary School link listening and speaking activities to topical subjects, for example ‘Brexit’, to develop key stage 2 learners’ abilities to listen respectfully to each other and to develop further their viewpoints.

Learners explore how established speakers, such as politicians, listen and respond to questions, and use facts and figures to support their position. Teachers encourage learners to think in different ways, be it emotionally, creatively or logically. This has helped learners to enhance their discursive writing through a balanced and considered approach, for example when writing letters about local issues.

- 80** When teachers provide authentic and engaging opportunities, learners deepen their understanding of subjects and concepts through listening and talk. They learn to discuss complex ideas, challenge and build upon each other’s thinking, analyse, evaluate and reflect. In the best cases, teachers ask incisive questions, which probe learners’ understanding but simultaneously challenge them to develop their verbal responses. In a few schools where teaching is weak, teachers are overly reliant on closed questions, which are useful for establishing learners’ recall and knowledge, but which present insufficient opportunity for them to develop their speaking skills.

- 81** In general, learners in key stage 2 do not benefit from enough opportunities to take part in learning experiences that focus specifically on talking, for example to improve their ability to question, challenge and build on the contributions of others through debate. This is often because, in less effective schools, listening and speaking are viewed as skills that support reading and writing, rather than as skills that need to be developed in their own right. Frequently, teachers' interventions and comments focus exclusively on what learners are talking about rather than also on how they are saying it. Recently, supported by their regional consortium, for example, more schools are beginning to consider how they can improve their provision for developing learners' listening and speaking skills.

Developing learners' reading skills

- 82** Most non-maintained settings and nursery schools focus strongly on developing children's pre-reading skills, including their phonological awareness through songs, rhymes and music. They immerse children in language-rich environments, indoors and outdoors, where children explore sounds, print and stories. In the most effective settings, children have continuous access to books in all areas of provision. Staff offer daily structured opportunities for children to hear stories and they model how to handle books. They use props to encourage children to retell and re-enact traditional tales and nursery rhymes. They introduce the teaching of letter-sound correspondence only when individual children are developmentally ready.
- 83** Most primary schools plan appropriately for progression in learners' reading development across the school. They develop learners' early reading skills successfully, balancing the development of phonemic awareness and comprehension skills as they move through the foundation phase so that, by the end of Year 2, many learners achieve appropriate fluency and accuracy in their reading. In key stage 2, most schools provide learners with a reading diet that helps to progress their reading comprehension and develop their research skills suitably. In a few schools where learners do not improve

their reading skills well enough year-on-year, often this is because there is not a whole-school approach to developing their decoding skills, vocabulary knowledge and response to what they read.

- 84** In the most effective schools, their systematic and consistent approach to the teaching of phonics is well embedded and sustained over time. In addition, staff pay appropriate attention to developing learners' sight vocabulary and recognition of high frequency words, to improve their decoding skills and reading fluency. In these schools, learning support assistants have strong expertise in teaching learners' phonemic knowledge. They support learners well through interventions, where they practise important reading strategies with learners, such as segmenting phonemes and using the context to predict unknown words. They monitor learners' reading progress closely and adjust their teaching suitably in response to learners' individual needs.
- 85** Nearly all primary schools use published schemes to support their teaching of phonics and many do so successfully. In a few schools, staff do not take sufficient account of learners' developmental stages before the formal introduction of phonics teaching. This means that, for learners with underdeveloped language and communication skills, such as poor phonological awareness, they struggle to make the link between letters and sounds. This happens less in non-maintained settings and nursery schools than in nursery classes in primary schools.
- 86** It is common for the most effective schools to have a clearly defined strategy that includes whole school 'non-negotiables' setting out how and when learners are taught reading and the experiences they should have. These schools develop learners' reading across the curriculum highly successfully. They teach a broad range of reading strategies in discrete language and literacy lessons, and then plan opportunities for learners to practise these strategies and apply their skills of reading for information through their topic work.

87 Schools who develop reading successfully teach it daily. Where standards are good or better, schools use a combination of shared, modelled, guided and independent approaches effectively to teach reading. For instance, staff provide focused teaching inputs to groups of learners, normally organised by reading ability. In the best examples, there are well-planned carousels of reading-based activities to progress the fluency and accuracy of learners' reading and their knowledge and understanding of text. **You can read an example of how a school uses this approach on pages 145 to 146.** The most effective teaching includes 'think alouds', where staff model reading strategies skilfully to learners. This helps them to understand, for example, how a reader tackles unfamiliar words or regains meaning when it is lost, and how to use clues within a text to infer meaning or gather information efficiently. **The examples of effective practice on pages 147 to 149 provide more information about how teachers do this.**

Twice a week, key stage 2 learners take part in a carousel of language and literacy activities to improve their literacy skills, including their reading comprehension and use of reading strategies, sentence construction and editing skills.

In turn, individual groups benefit from direct teaching, while their peers work independently to practise and consolidate their skills. Teachers model differentiated questions intended to develop inferential, evaluative and appreciation skills so that learners can use them independently and with each other. This allows learners to develop their understanding through verbal responses, rather than through written answers. Learners develop the ability to work independently at an appropriately challenging level. Teachers identify precisely the skills learners need to improve and address gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

In a whole-school approach, teachers in a primary school build ‘think alouds’ (Harvey and Goudvis, 2013) into everyday teaching and learning activities.

This allows them to make explicit and model to learners who at different stages of reading fluency and understanding, the skills effective readers apply when they read. The modelling of thinking processes helps learners to apply a wide range of reading strategies when they read text independently, for example how to use clues to make sense of what they read. It also enables them to monitor their understanding of a text as they read, and to become critical and discerning readers.

- 88** In addition to guided reading approaches, highly effective schools incorporate the development of specific reading skills, such as appreciation and synthesis, into whole-class literacy teaching in key stage 2. Subsequently, learners apply these skills successfully in their work across the curriculum, for example locating information, reorganising it and presenting it in the form of a flowchart to explain how a volcano erupts.
- 89** In the best teaching, staff develop learners’ understanding and response to texts through skilful questioning appropriate to the text, and to learners’ age and stage of development. Where teaching is consistently good or better, usually staff focus more on discussing texts with learners in depth through shared reading experiences with picture books, ‘big books’ or on-screen texts. Staff in these schools develop the reading skills of literal understanding, inference and deduction, reorganisation, evaluation and appreciation, at every stage of the learning journey and not just when learners reach Years 5 and 6.

- 90 Many schools use written comprehension exercises that learners of all ages, complete in different areas of the curriculum. However, the quality and usefulness of these activities in supporting reading development are too variable. Where provision is most effective, reading tasks encourage learners to draw on prior knowledge and experience and to interact with or interpret a text. For example, they consider different types of questions, which will elicit depth of understanding and allow meaningful assessment of a range of reading skills. The best schools recognise that the comprehension 'exercise' is not necessarily the best way to ensure learners' understanding of a text and do not always require them to provide written responses to questions. They use a variety of 'active' teaching approaches, such as shared reading and providing learners with purposeful tasks, to help them to read to learn. **The case study on pages 150 to 152 shows how Tywyn Primary School encourages learners to interact with texts to develop their reading and speaking skills.**

Teachers at Tywyn Primary School make effective use of poetry to develop learners' reading and speaking skills in Years 5 and 6.

They use the ballad 'Timothy Winters' by Charles Causley, to develop learners' advanced reading skills of inference, deduction, evaluation and appreciation. Pertinent questions and wider discussion help learners understand and comment on characters and the poem's challenging underlying themes. Learners also have the opportunity to view animated versions of the text and discuss images, music, sound effects and silence. Teachers then challenge learners to assume the role of a character and collaborate to create their own success criteria for a group drama challenge. Learners use the success criteria purposefully to provide each other with constructive criticism during their rehearsals and after their final performances.

91 Where primary schools create a reading culture successfully, it is based on the belief that being able to read well is a key life skill for children, whatever their background. These schools believe that every child can learn to read with the right teaching and support, recognising that not all children will have had the opportunity to develop a love of reading at home. Therefore, it has to be taught and encouraged at school – just like any other area of the curriculum. Often, these schools develop a whole-school strategy for promoting reading for pleasure, and build time for all children, including reluctant readers, to read independently, read aloud and be read to during the school day.

We explore how schools develop a reading culture, in greater detail, on pages 87 to 96.

Developing learners' writing skills

92 Overall, there have been improvements to the teaching of aspects of writing in primary schools in recent years, with more explicit teaching of the knowledge learners need to compose their own texts for different purposes and audiences. Well-planned activities enthuse and motivate learners and meet their learning needs. The best writing is often stimulated by learners' being closely involved in choosing their topic for writing, having a real-life experience, engaging with exciting literature and responding to spontaneous events, which capture their interest and imagination. The best teachers make skilful use of approaches, such as modelling, to develop learners' writing skills. In the very few most effective schools, teachers agree how to teach spelling, sentence construction, punctuation and grammar, in ways that are appropriate to learners at different stages of writing development. A very few schools use electronic devices such as laptops, interactive whiteboards and tablets particularly effectively, to develop and improve learners' writing abilities. **You can find out more information about this on pages 153 to 154.**

At Trinant Primary School, teachers provide learners with effective verbal feedback, rather than lengthy written feedback, that encourages them to take responsibility for identifying and making improvements to their writing.

Teachers identify specific aspects of successful writing and challenge learners to review their work in progress. The effective use of a visualiser to share learners' work supports 'in the moment' reflection and subsequent improvement. Learners reflecting purposefully on their work and being allowed time to redraft and refine their writing helps them develop a good understanding of writing 'as a process' and why it is important to make changes to improve it.

- 93** In settings and nursery classes where provision for developing children's writing is effective, practitioners have a strong understanding of how to support emergent writing. For example, they encourage children to retell a story, such as the Little Red Hen, using a range of tools to make marks and pictures. Children enjoy the opportunity to 'read' aloud the 'writing' they have created. In these settings and nursery classes, practitioners offer a range of exciting opportunities for children to develop their understanding of writing for different purposes in real-life or imaginative contexts, such as when writing labels for daffodil bulbs they plant or when recording their recipe for pumpkin pie in a mud kitchen.

- 94 In most schools, teachers use appropriate methods to support younger learners to form letters accurately, as the basis for developing a fluent handwriting style. They provide regular purposeful activities for learners to practise these essential skills and offer effective feedback, drawing learners' attention to the particular aspects of their writing that they have improved, for example, 'You remembered to cross your letter 't' this time'. Importantly, they encourage and support further effort and provide precise guidance on how to improve next time.
- 95 Schools who teach writing effectively, teach spelling explicitly. In a minority of schools where the teaching of writing is underdeveloped, teachers often 'test' learners' spelling but do not provide sufficient opportunities for them to learn about word patterns and spelling strategies. Frequently, this is because there are gaps in teachers' own knowledge about how the English spelling system works, and in particular their understanding of how morphology and etymology can support learners' spelling development. **On pages 155 to 159, we provide examples of how schools use professional learning activities to improve the teaching of spelling.**

One school has prioritised learners' spelling in its improvement plan.

Staff benefit from weekly professional learning sessions to discuss research into spelling development. Improving their knowledge and understanding of spelling in the English language and its complexity helps them to develop effective teaching and learning approaches to improve learners' spelling, as an explicit aspect of their writing development. Through considering teaching approaches carefully, including those that focus on spelling that require learners to use phonological, orthographic and morphological knowledge, practitioners have recognised the need to spend more time teaching learners about prefixes, suffixes and word roots.

In one junior school, staff focus on improving their knowledge of how the spelling system works through a range of professional learning activities.

They develop confidence to analyse learners' spelling errors and to consider what these errors tell them about learners' stage of spelling development. They analyse spelling across groups of learners in their classes, identifying common errors and patterns of misspellings that inform their subsequent teaching of spelling for a half term within the current curriculum topics and shared texts. Learners review and identify where they have spelled words correctly, where previously they made errors, and use their knowledge from the teaching sessions to correct their misspellings. They become more confident in their knowledge of letter-sound relationships, word parts, letter patterns and word origins to 'have a go' and monitor their own spelling.

Another school has explored ways of helping learners transfer their knowledge of spellings learned to their independent writing.

Every week, teachers choose ten words that are matched well to learners' current spelling ability for them to learn. They provide spelling workshops for parents, to demonstrate different strategies to help learners practise and learn spellings. This includes activities such as creating crosswords and spelling rhymes that engage learners effectively and help foster a curiosity in words and writing. By working closely with parents, staff help to develop effective spelling pedagogy in school and at home, and tackle misconceptions about spelling.



- 96 Many schools make appropriate use of commercial schemes to help learners to develop sentence construction skills and to achieve standards of punctuation and grammar suitable for their age. In the most effective examples, teachers integrate ideas from these resources with their knowledge of how best to engage learners successfully. Often, this works best when teaching is interactive, is related to the topic and text type learners are studying at that time, and when learners have purposeful and regular opportunities to use and apply the skills that are ‘under development’. Teaching is less effective when sentence-level skills are taught in isolation and learners do not have sufficient time to practise them in meaningful ways. **You can read about how Gaer Primary School uses evidence-based approaches successfully to develop learners’ composition and transcription skills on pages 160 to 161.**

Teachers in Gaer Primary School use a combination of evidence-based approaches to improve learners’ composition and transcription skills.

All language and literacy tasks are based around a text (written or visual) or an artefact. These often-unusual choices engage and stimulate learners’ interests. Learners experience writing models and explore their structure, organisation and language features. This helps to establish suitably high expectations for learners’ own writing. The use of ‘thinking maps’ helps learners to structure their ideas, consider sentence construction and develop their vocabulary. Teacher feedback and peer assessment against precise success criteria help learners to revise and refine their writing. Consequently, most learners become confident, competent and independent writers by the end of key stage 2.

- 97 Most teachers have sound knowledge of different literary and non-literary text types. In many schools, where standards of teaching are good, staff teach the features and conventions of forms and genres effectively. Increasingly, as they consider the new curriculum, teachers provide learners with a real reason to write and audience to write for, for example through using topical issues, arranging visits to places of interest, inviting visitors into school and having a whole-school focus. **The case study on pages 130 to 131 provides further information about how Ewloe Primary School provides learners with a clear purpose for developing their writing skills.**
- 98 Where there are shortcomings in progressing learners' writing skills, teachers do not always have enough awareness of the opportunities learners have had to write for different purposes and audiences in previous years. Consequently, teachers do not always build well enough on learners' existing knowledge of the structure, organisation and language features of particular text types and spend too long consolidating what learners already know. Too often, in these situations, their expectations of learners' writing, particularly those who are more able, are too low. Teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to write freely using the range of writing skills that they already have and this slows their progress. Teaching is often too directive, even where learners already have a good enough grasp of the form to write by themselves. Conversely, teachers do not always provide sufficient scaffolding for long enough for weaker writers either.
- 99 Generally, learners now have more opportunities to write at length than was the case in the last inspection cycle. Many schools provide worthwhile opportunities for learners of all ages, to think of ideas and to plan and organise them, using a range of helpful prompts and organisers, before writing. When teaching is most effective, learners understand writing as a process. Teachers help them to develop a range of strategies to draft, evaluate and refine their writing successfully.

100 The quality of extended writing opportunities and the expectation for learners to check, correct and re-draft their work are still far too variable. Even in a minority of primary schools where learners develop useful editing skills to check and improve the accuracy of their writing, few teachers help learners to improve the content and structure of their writing well enough. Where there are shortcomings in teaching, teachers do not identify precisely the weaknesses in learners' writing. This makes it difficult for the teacher to determine the best next steps for learners and for learners to know where to focus their efforts to improve their writing skills.

Developing learners' vocabulary

101 In many schools where the development of learners' vocabulary is generally good, staff immerse learners in learning environments which are 'word rich'. For example, they create interactive working walls or displays to support learners' vocabulary use and provide opportunities for learners to explore words and expand their vocabularies through role-play, discussion and drama.

102 Where provision is strong, staff have high expectations for learners' vocabulary development and understand their role in facilitating this. Teachers and learning support assistants strive to introduce learners of all abilities and ages to new vocabulary through their own choice of words. Their own spoken and written language acts as an effective model for learners in a wide range of contexts.

103 In effective settings and schools, practitioners use a combination of planned and incidental opportunities to help learners to acquire and use new words. They provide a range of high-quality texts and exciting contexts for learning, which stem from learners' interests and needs. This helps to stimulate a rich response in learners' spoken and written language. Often teachers use a class novel to extend and introduce learners to new vocabulary. In the best teaching, they probe learners' understanding of vocabulary through skilful questioning during shared and guided reading sessions. They provide valuable feedback to learners on their writing, to support them to make better word choices.

- 104** Where practitioners' knowledge of individual learners' receptive and expressive language abilities is strong, they tailor their approaches to meet individual learners' needs. For example, they use images, gestures and sign language to support the learning of new words. They also avoid the temptation to oversimplify language when learners have a sufficient level of understanding to process more sophisticated words.
- 105** In a very few schools, where language teaching is highly successful, teachers plan explicitly for learners' vocabulary knowledge, as a distinct aspect of language learning. They consider carefully what key target vocabulary they need to teach learners to understand and use, so that they listen and speak appropriately in different contexts, make meaning when reading and write successfully for a wide range of purposes. They consider how best to integrate the careful selection of appropriate words into teaching and learning so that learners develop, consolidate and apply their word knowledge in meaningful contexts across the curriculum. In these very few highly effective schools, teachers use research-informed approaches to teach vocabulary, such as:

- teaching words that are not part of learners' everyday conversations or reading experiences
- explaining word meanings and helping pupils to draw connections with what they already know
- providing authentic opportunities to expose learners frequently to a new word through spoken and written language so it becomes 'learnt'
- raising awareness of and interest in the special characteristics of words, such as word parts (morphology) and their origins (etymology)
- teaching learners strategies they can apply independently to work out the meaning of words that are new to them (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013).

106 Schools who develop learners' vocabulary highly successfully think about the number of words learners know, but also how well they know those words (Dale, 1965; Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013). They help them to develop 'depth' of word knowledge through carefully designed reading, speaking and writing activities. As a result, learners recognise and understand the new words and their possible range of meanings in familiar contexts. Subsequently, they draw on this knowledge to infer their meaning in new contexts. **You can read about the approaches schools use to teach vocabulary successfully on pages pages 162 to 168.**

In a non-maintained setting, staff take pictures of children during the day to create a nursery book that is used to help children recall and talk about what they have done during the day.

Where relevant, adults help to model specific vocabulary, including mathematical vocabulary, such as 'heavy and light' and 'full and empty'.

In a nursery school, practitioners monitor closely individual learners' understanding and use of vocabulary in the role-play café.

They practise words and language patterns with the children prior to visiting cafés in the community, where they use and apply their skills in a real-life context to order food and drinks.



In a reception class, the teacher asks learners to ‘give out’ the healthy snacks and subsequently thanks them for distributing them sensibly, linking the words for a few days until all learners understand the meaning of ‘distribute’.

Learners in a Year 1 class read *The Tiger Who Lost His Stripes* by Anthony Paul.

The teacher explores with learners target words such as ‘stately’, ‘dignified’, ‘splendid’ and ‘pally’ to expand their knowledge of groups of related words. Teachers challenge more able learners, by asking, for example, which word might be the most appropriate choice, and to explain why.

When planning learning, teachers identify carefully which topic-specific vocabulary they will introduce to learners across areas of learning.

They take advantage of authentic opportunities to develop learners’ knowledge about words and languages. For example, Year 2 learners are enthused by their ‘castles’ topic and use terms, such as ‘portcullis’ and ‘moat’, confidently in their talk and in their writing.

Their teacher introduces them to more advanced technical vocabulary to describe the castles’ features, such as ‘bastion’ and ‘trebuchet’. This leads learners to ask questions about the history and origin of these words from the Middle Ages. More able learners relate them to words they already know, for example making connections between the design of the ‘trebuchet’ and the word ‘bucket’.



In this school, a Year 5 teacher adopts a direct approach to teaching vocabulary within an authentic context that encourages learners to make more sophisticated language choices and write persuasive letters.

To support this approach, the teacher takes good account of learners' previous experiences of talking and writing to persuade. Learners of all abilities, including those who are more able, do not use a sufficiently wide vocabulary when writing extended pieces. Therefore, the teacher identifies key 'target' words for teaching and provides relevant opportunities for learners to talk about the meanings of these words. This helps learners develop their 'word consciousness', encourages them to extend their vocabulary and improves their ability to present more compelling cases to persuade.

- 107** Where provision for learners' vocabulary development is not as strong, there is not a good enough balance between the formal aspects of teaching vocabulary and opportunities for pupils to develop and use their word knowledge independently in relevant contexts. Too often, vocabulary is taught in isolation, which limits learners' ability to draw effectively on this knowledge in future learning.
- 108** A minority of schools do not focus sufficiently on developing learners' vocabulary, especially those learners with limited vocabulary who do not have rich language experiences outside of school.
- 109** Overall, staff in these schools do not have a secure enough understanding of the importance of teaching vocabulary knowledge to learners and the impact it has on reading progress.

Fostering a culture of reading

- 110** Many settings and schools pay good attention to providing attractive and engaging school libraries and classroom reading areas. Often, these are developed as ‘special places’, which learners value. Libraries are well-stocked with a wide range of high-quality fiction and non-fiction texts, poetry, picture books, graphic novels, as well as other media, such as magazines and audio books. In the best examples, there is investment in contemporary and classic children’s literature, and learners are involved in purchasing new releases.
- 111** Good schools use displays to promote literature and a love of reading. They present learners’ work relating to class shared texts effectively, such as book reviews, character portraits and artwork inspired by the narratives and poems. A few schools recognise the relationship between reading and vocabulary development, and use displays purposefully to broaden and develop pupils’ vocabulary in literature-rich contexts.
- 112** Nearly all settings, nursery and primary schools give children essential beneficial opportunities to interact with books, stories and rhymes when they start in nursery classes. In the best examples, practitioners build well on children’s early reading experiences from Flying Start and non-maintained settings, particularly in how they engage parents and carers in reading for enjoyment activities.



Staff at Little Stars Nursery in Pontypool immerse children in traditional stories and rhymes to build their storytelling skills and enjoyment of books.

Reading together regularly and sharing stories in school and at home helps to foster this enjoyment of books at a young age. Adults teach and share a wide range of traditional stories and rhymes with the children. They unpick simple themes and talk about the characters. The children have the chance to re-enact the stories and rhymes, sometimes adding their own characters or experiences, with props and puppets in the setting and at home. The setting encourages parents to borrow books to share with their children at home and holds workshops to explain how to use the props and resources.

- 113** Sharing books and reading aloud to learners in foundation phase classes are regular features of nearly all settings and schools. Many schools benefit from the support of parents and other adult volunteers who listen to children read.
- 114** We know it is important to read to children often and that doing so encourages independent reading. In general, as they progress through key stage 2, learners have fewer and fewer opportunities to hear teachers read stories and poems aloud, particularly as a socially enjoyable activity.
- 115** In most schools, learners receive an appropriate reading diet of fiction and non-fiction, which includes their interests. Many learners take a range of books home to enjoy independently or with their family. However, a few schools do not explore a wide enough range of strategies to support disadvantaged learners and their families to access reading opportunities and to encourage enjoyment of reading. **You can read about how**

Trinant Primary School has been successful in fostering a shared reading culture with parents on pages 171 to 172.

Fostering a shared reading culture between learners, parents and staff, and developing everyone's desire to read for pleasure, is an improvement priority at Trinant Primary School.

Teachers' enthusiasm for reading is a key factor in this. Although there is no community library, a helpful partnership with Islwyn High School, and a donation of books from its English department, has enabled the school to establish a lending library with a 'twist' for parents and families. Teachers read and classify the books according to genre and provide enjoyment ratings. The level of parental engagement and support for pupils' reading has increased considerably. Children see their parents, as well as their teachers, as 'readers' and this has helped to raise the status of reading for pleasure in the community. It has also increased learners' engagement with books, particularly those learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

116 A very few schools foster learners' enjoyment of reading in a wider range of media, for example to develop their ability to read images (without or in combination with text) in picture books, animations and films. This broadens their view of what 'reading' is and motivates them to explore different types and styles of text.

Cwmrhydyceirw Primary School uses film to develop learners' literacy and digital skills.

The school adopts a seven-step approach to planning teaching and learning activities, which develops learners' skills of prediction, inference and deduction, comprehension, writing, planning and pitching, film making, and culminates in a whole-school celebration. Parents and carers are invited to attend the school's film festival and learners enjoy watching each their film 'premières'.

The impact of this approach includes learners becoming better, more confident speakers. They read images and text with greater understanding, and use more descriptive, varied and exciting vocabulary in their writing. Film making tasks support learners to negotiate and build agreement to work towards a common goal.

They take responsibility for organising their ideas and adopt specific roles. This helps to increase learners' self-esteem and develop their confidence.



117 Settings and schools that are most successful in developing a flourishing reading culture have the following features in common:

● **Creating a shared vision**

Leaders and staff understand the impact of reading on learners' outcomes and wellbeing. They know why a reading culture is important and what an engaged reader looks like. They place reading and literature at the core of the school's work. These settings and schools feel 'alive' with a 'buzz about books'. In all instances, leaders drive this ethos.

● **Developing the environment**

Staff, in effective settings and schools, understand the role the physical environment plays in fostering a love of reading and developing learners as 'readers'. They provide inviting communal areas to explore texts, such as libraries, book areas and displays. As well as indoor spaces, they make creative use of the outdoor environment to promote reading.

● **Reading aloud**

Leaders understand the benefits of adults reading aloud to learners of all ages. They create time and space throughout the school day for staff and volunteers to absorb learners of all ages in stories, poems or non-fiction texts. Adults provide a valuable model of expressive reading for learners and this enables them to access more challenging texts than they would be able to read on their own. Crucially, it is an opportunity for children and adults to share the joy of books and to read, and listen, for pleasure.



● Engaging with parents

Harnessing the engagement and commitment of parents to build a reading culture which extends into the home, is a persistent focus for effective providers. They work hard to reach every family. They involve parents in their children's reading through non-threatening support and practical ideas to encourage reading for pleasure at home.

They invite parents to share in special reading events, such as visits from authors and illustrators.

● Reading with others

Parents, carers, grandparents, governors and volunteers from the local community visit settings and schools often to read with learners. Learners of different ages read together as 'buddies'. Older readers enjoy being role models for beginning readers. Younger learners, who are not yet fluent in their reading, benefit from their reading 'mentors' who support and encourage them.

● Developing wider partnerships

Effective settings and schools forge beneficial partnerships within the community and further afield to promote a culture of reading. These include partnerships with local libraries and community hubs, universities and national organisations, such as the United Kingdom Literacy Association, Book Trust Cymru, Literature Wales and the British Film Institute.



● Celebrating reading

Staff celebrate and promote reading every day, not just on special occasions. They talk about and promote a wide range of texts of different types and genres. Adults share their enthusiasm for literary and non-literary texts through assemblies, book clubs and during celebrations, such as National Poetry Day and World Book Day. They provide reading-related incentives for learners, such as book prizes for good attendance. They use 'challenges' such as 'read a million words' to motivate learners and promote positive reading habits.



● Planning the curriculum

Schools that are highly effective in fostering a culture of reading plan their curriculum topics and themes around high-quality literature and specific genres. Learners take an active part in this planning process.

Teachers choose texts with suitably challenging themes, which are rich in their use of language. This helps to provide learners from all backgrounds with an opportunity to discuss ideas, people, times and places outside their immediate experience and to enhance their vocabulary.

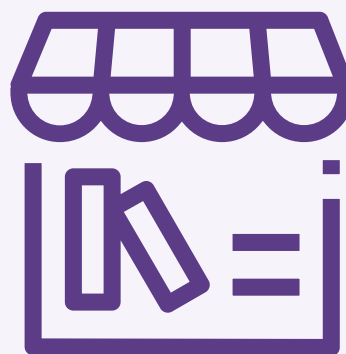
Schools arrange frequent visits to the theatre for learners of all ages and invite authors to school. Staff plan these experiences carefully as part of their text-based curriculum topics. They recognise that these wider enrichment experiences are an important part of fostering a love of literature for learners, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.



● Choosing resources

Leaders invest in reading. They spend money and time to buy reading materials and develop learning environments that excite and motivate learners. Staff recognise the importance of giving learners a choice of reading. They encourage learners to choose what they read, provide guidance sensitively to struggling readers and respect learners' choices. They involve learners in selecting books for classroom and school libraries, and they give them responsibilities for managing the resources.

In the best examples, schools consider diversity carefully when choosing reading resources, to reflect the school's community and wider society in general and to avoid stereotypes, wherever possible.



● Teaching and assessing reading effectively

Effective primary schools are systematic in their approach to teaching and assessing reading to ensure learners develop core word-reading and comprehension skills. They use a range of approaches skilfully, for example direct teaching, and shared, guided and independent reading.

Staff make use of every opportunity the curriculum offers to teach learners to become lifelong readers. This means that they teach learners knowledge about authors, poets and different text types, and how to choose books for pleasure and to support their learning. They help them to develop reading stamina, so that they enjoy reading longer, more complex texts and concentrate when reading for sustained periods.

● **Being 'reading' teachers**

In the most effective schools, practitioners are exemplary role models for reading. Teachers are explicit about being readers themselves and the pleasure it brings. They discuss books regularly with their learners and with parents. Practitioners have a wide knowledge of high-quality children's literature, including contemporary texts. They keep up to date with new publications, for example through social media and literary organisations. As a result, they are able to share their views with learners about the books they have read, make recommendations to support learners' different needs and encourage their reading interests.

● **Supporting the professional development of staff**

Leaders recognise that the key factors in enabling all children to engage positively with reading are the skills, knowledge and enthusiasm of the staff who teach them. They ensure that staff access a range of high-quality professional development, which supports them to develop learners' reading behaviours and attitudes to reading, as well as their reading skills.



Cogan Primary School has used a wide range of language and literacy-related partnerships to establish a school's book award to champion diversity and inclusion through children's literature.

There was already a strong reading culture in the school, where access to rich literature is an entitlement for all learners. This initiative strengthened learners' and the wider community's interest in, and enthusiasm for, reading. The role of the additional learning needs co-ordinator, working closely with key stage 2 learners, and support from the parent teacher association, has been pivotal in the success of this project. Learners reviewed the books publishers had submitted for consideration carefully.

They felt it was important that the content was ethnically and/or culturally diverse and that they included non-stereotypical characters or characters with disabilities. The initiative attracted attention and support from well-known children's authors, such as Michael Rosen. In May 2019, Literature Wales announced the winner of the Cogan Diversity Picture Book Award 2019 on its website.

'When a teacher reads to pupils it creates a bonding experience. This is important for developing good relationships.'

Year 6 pupil, Cwmrhydyceirw Primary School



'Teachers think it's important for us to read books at home because it's all about gadgets now. They encourage us to read a lot of books.'

Year 5 pupil, Cogan Primary School



Effective support for learners and their families

118 Most settings and schools use a suitable range of assessments to track and monitor learners' progress in language and literacy over time. This helps them to identify where learners are on the language continuum, and set appropriate targets for them, including improving the skills they need most to develop. For example, most schools use appropriately the outcomes from language screening tools and the foundation phase profile (Welsh Government, 2017) to identify where learners in nursery and reception classes might have additional learning needs, or possible developmental delay in one or more aspects of language. The most effective schools analyse this information thoroughly to plan the amount and type of intervention to put in place.

This school makes effective use of a language-screening tool that helps teachers to monitor closely all learners' progress against each aspect of language in their early years in school.

Used judiciously, it enables teachers to set appropriate targets and design bespoke learning plans to meet the individual needs of learners. In addition, the assessment tool and teaching resource that accompanies it help teachers to judge effectively when to begin teaching phonics and high-frequency words to individual learners.



All learners in a primary school have 'person centred profiles' to value and support their language development.

These profiles, also read by new or temporary staff to the school before meeting learners for the first time, help to reduce the risk of frustration or misunderstanding for learners as they develop their communication skills. The school encourages adults and children to value different forms of communication and different languages, as this is important for learners whose home language is different to that of their teachers, or for learners who experience speech and language or hearing difficulties.

119 Many schools use a range of interventions well to support learners of all ages who struggle to acquire basic skills in reading and spelling. The most effective schools make judicious choices about the interventions they use and keep these under careful review. In these schools, highly trained practitioners support learners to make strong progress from their starting points. For example, they deliver interventions in ways that support learners' thinking and independent learning skills, alongside their language development.

Teachers in key stage 2 use a twenty-minute session before the class's literacy lesson to pre-teach essential knowledge to support learners identified as having underdeveloped language skills.

They use this time to address aspects such as more challenging vocabulary that might cause problems to learners in the lesson if, for example, they were asked to read a narrative independently and understand characters in it. The teacher rehearses learners' prior knowledge of reading strategies they can use to help them gain meaning from an unknown text. Through interactive activities, learners explore the meaning of the identified words and use them in context. This approach motivates learners and raises their confidence to respond enthusiastically to their work.

A weekly visit from Cariat ‘the reading dog’ helps vulnerable learners to develop their reading skills and supports their wellbeing effectively.

Careful identification of those most likely to benefit, and the choice of books about issues or experiences that relate to their personal circumstances, is key. This approach helps learners to use strategies to support their reading, for example, by discussing ways of trying to read new words or ways of remembering tricky words. The calming presence of the dog helps vulnerable learners to relax into reading and increases their self-esteem encouraging them to deal better with personal issues.

120 In planning additional support for learners’ language and literacy development, a few schools do not always make well-informed decisions about:

- whether individuals or groups of learners require specialist programmes (which practitioners deliver faithfully as intended) or whether different teaching and learning approaches would be more appropriate
- who is best placed to deliver the intervention or teaching approach
- where the intervention should take place (for example, at home as well as in the setting or school)
- how often and for how long the intervention or approach should be used
- what the research says about the effectiveness of the intervention or teaching approach
- when and how to review learners’ progress and what an appropriate ‘exit’ strategy from an intervention might be

- how practitioners will support learners to transfer their learning from one-to-one or small group interventions to class-based learning

This means that schools do not always target their resources well enough to support learners with weak language skills, additional learning needs or those who have gaps in their learning experiences. As a result, these learners do not make as much progress as they could in language and literacy.



121 Most schools work well with external agencies to access support or guidance to enhance vulnerable and disadvantaged learners' language and literacy. These include specialist services, such as speech and language therapists, and support for learners with physical or learning disabilities, who require highly personalised interventions to meet their needs. In the best examples, specialists provide advice and training to practitioners and parents on specific areas of language development, for example the use of alternative and augmentative communication systems. The effective training of staff and careful use of guidance from specialist practitioners have a strong influence on how successful interventions are at improving learners' skills.

Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority provides a cross-directorate approach to supporting early language intervention for children identified as experiencing language delay, helping to ease their transition into non-maintained settings and school-based nursery provision.

This one-to-one support is achieved through the Resilient Families Service and involves close collaboration between speech and language therapists, parenting workers, health visitors, 'talk and play' support workers and other multi-agency partners. Effective speech and communication screening assessments are followed by bespoke packages of support for individual families that are monitored carefully to ensure that they remain appropriate. This co-ordinated approach helps to identify children who are not making expected progress from across the local authority, and to provide them and their families with continuity of support from the early years into funded education.

122 In most non-maintained settings and nursery schools, and in many primary schools, partnership working supports learners effectively so they make good progress in their language and literacy skills. Relationships with parents and carers are usually positive and enhance further learners' enthusiasm for learning language. A few schools do not focus well enough on identifying ways to support parents to reduce the barriers poverty presents to learners' language development.

Woodlands Community Primary School recognises clearly the important association between children's language development and their health and success throughout life.

Consequently, it works effectively with others, including Torfaen local authority's 'Early Language Team', health visitors and the Flying Start provision to support parents to provide the environment, from birth to five, that children need for their language development to thrive. Through working closely with the school, parents develop their understanding of how they can support their children's language skills and why this is so important for their educational outcomes and life chances.

123 In a very few settings and schools serving the most socially disadvantaged areas in Wales, the support and guidance for learners' language and literacy development is excellent. The positive engagement between schools, families and communities is often a key component of this excellence.

These very few settings and schools have the following common features:

- they recognise the important relationship between learners' language development and their wellbeing, and support the development of both effectively
- they forge strong multi-agency partnerships with health, social care and community organisations to benefit learners and their families
- they provide access to services, advice and resources that might otherwise be inaccessible for families, including at times when they are in most need of support
- they prioritise engagement with and support for parents of children with poor language skills, so they feel ready and able to work with the school to help them make suitable progress
- they have in-depth knowledge and understanding of the weaknesses and gaps in learners' skills and know how best to tackle these
- they ensure the 'flow' of information and support as children move from childcare and pre-school settings to primary school education (for example, from Flying Start settings to nursery classes)

- they provide high-quality teaching, learning and assessment to meet individual learners' needs in all aspects of language and literacy development
- they have high expectations and aspirations for what learners can achieve





Tremorfa Nursery School has engaged successfully with families to support learners' language skills.

This engagement is achieved through a range of approaches, including a community support officer who works helpfully with different groups of parents each morning. Weekly 'drop in' sessions led by health visitors offer support for families whose children have special educational needs. Also, the school offers a six-week programme for all parents and children prior to the children starting school.

During half-termly 'stay and play' sessions, parents spend a morning or afternoon in the nursery, taking part in language-based activities with their children. Family engagement is a strength of the school and it supports parents who have weak language skills well.

This school has fostered a ‘low threat-high support’ environment that encourages most parents to engage well with staff to support their children’s language development at home.

For example, every foundation phase learner has a home-school book bag that learners take home each week. This includes a fun language activity for parents to enjoy with their children, for example a rhyme to learn, a picture book to read or a language game to play.

Every month, the school’s additional learning needs’ co-ordinator holds ‘Monday advice, support and help’ sessions for parents, known as ‘Mash’. Helping parents and carers to support their children’s listening, speaking and early reading helps learners to make better progress in developing their skills, for example blending phonemes to read simple words.

- 124** Currently, only a minority of schools have a sufficiently robust whole-school strategy for addressing the impact of social disadvantage on learners’ progress and achievements in language and literacy.
- 125** Most settings and schools use grant funding, such as the early years development grant and the pupil development grant (PDG) to provide literacy projects and interventions to support eligible learners. Our report published in February 2020, **‘Effective school support for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils – case studies of good practice’** (Estyn, 2020c, p.43) identified that the impact of the grant is too variable overall. The proportion of schools that make effective use of the PDG has remained at around two-thirds of primary schools.



Leadership



Developing provision and raising standards

- 126** Nearly all settings and schools identify the development of learners' language and literacy as a core strategic aim and reflect this suitably in their improvement planning and self-evaluation processes. Most schools have appropriate leadership structures in place to support the co-ordination and development of their provision for language and literacy, for example through a curriculum team, led by a senior leader.
- 127** In settings and schools that are most successful in developing learners' language and literacy skills, there is a clearly understood and co-ordinated strategy for doing so. These schools have developed highly successful approaches where there is a sustained focus on accelerating learners' progress from their starting points, so that learners often reach standards above expectation by the end of primary school. In settings and schools that are most effective at addressing inequalities in language and literacy, leaders ensure that staff provide exceptional teaching and learning that meet individual learners' needs. As a result, these schools challenge and nurture the language development of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and more able learners very effectively.
- 128** In a few schools, where shortcomings in learners' language and literacy are not addressed well enough, this is often because leaders do not drive a co-ordinated approach to developing learners' skills in all aspects of language and in literacy across the curriculum. Consequently, provision is inconsistent and teachers do not build on what a learner has accomplished previously to plan activities that challenge the learner to develop the skill further or to apply the skill in a different context.



129 Well-led settings and schools with highly effective provision for learners' language and literacy have the following common characteristics:

● **Vision and strategy**

In settings and primary schools where standards of language and literacy are high for all groups of learners, leaders establish a clear vision and strategic approach to developing learners' language and literacy. This stems from the importance leaders attribute to the progressive development of learners' skills and knowledge, and their drive and commitment to improve their life chances. In addition, the vision often reflects the context of the school, and the factors that may affect learners' ability to acquire language successfully.

● **An aspirational culture**

Through their strategic vision, highly effective school leaders promote an aspirational school-wide culture dedicated to achieving their purpose of improving learners' language and literacy. They communicate this purpose successfully to learners, staff, governors, parents and other members of the school community. They ensure that everyone understands the part they play in achieving this goal and why it is such an important aspect of the school's work.

● **Effective partnership working**

Settings and schools who are most successful at tackling the challenges of social disadvantage on learners' language and literacy draw on partnerships that span public health, healthcare, social care, housing and education sectors. Leaders invest in the skills and capabilities of their own staff and take a sustained multi-agency approach to support learners in school and in the home learning environment.



● **Defining and promoting high expectations**

In the very few schools where learners' progress in language and literacy is particularly strong, leaders define and promote high expectations for learning and teaching in all aspects of language and literacy. They are steadfast in making decisions that are right for the learners in their school and persist with approaches to learning and teaching that work. While leaders are sensitive and mindful of learners' circumstances and situations, they do not use these as a reason to lower their expectations of what learners can achieve.

● **Collaboration, knowledge and continuous improvement**

In the most effective schools, leaders develop a strong collaborative culture where staff work together closely. They cultivate leadership in others and ensure that all staff have access to, and benefit from, the school's collective knowledge. Leaders work with staff to use the growing body of evidence and research on language and literacy to inform their whole-school decision-making and planning. They target the school's resources and grants carefully, and evaluate robustly the impact of teaching on learners' standards and progress. The school's reviews and evaluations identify precise aspects of teaching and provision that need to improve and enable leaders and teachers to share the most successful practice across the school. This forms part of an effective continuous cycle of evaluation and improvement.



Developing expertise and building capacity

130 In *Education in Wales: Our national mission action plan 2017-21*, the Minister for Education identifies that if Wales is to be successful in achieving its goals for learners, the teaching profession will need to be:

- high-quality, collaborative and driven by a deep understanding of pedagogy and subject knowledge
- research-engaged, well informed and learning from excellence at local, national and international levels
- supported well by a range of learning professionals who can provide the additional capacity that is needed to meet the needs of every child
- led well by leaders who will ensure that every teacher can improve through effective collaboration, innovation, professional learning and opportunities to provide professional leadership to others (Welsh Government, 2017, p.11)

131 Leaders in most schools provide appropriate opportunities for teachers and learning support assistants to develop their subject knowledge and teaching skills in language and literacy. The schools where provision is strongest often have staff with specialist knowledge who share their expertise within their own schools and with others. The most effective leaders recognise the importance of learners having exemplary language role models and expect their staff to present as such. They support staff with access to specific high-quality professional learning,



focusing for example on technical aspects of language learning and how best to develop learners' language and literacy skills progressively. This may enhance the support for the development of learners' vocabulary and phonological awareness in the early years, and for extending the speaking, reading and writing skills of more able pupils at key stage 2. In a minority of settings and schools, not all practitioners are good language role models and leaders do not always address this issue as part of staff development.

132 In schools where learners make rapid progress in language and literacy, leaders often develop strong knowledge and expertise themselves and play a significant, participatory role in the school's professional learning and development activities. The leadership team usually has a balance of experience in the foundation phase and in key stage 2, and at least one member of the team has a very strong understanding of:

- child development
- how learners' language and literacy develop from the early years
- the key milestones learners should reach
- what practitioners should focus their teaching upon, at different developmental stages

In addition, the headteacher is nearly always committed to ensuring that all staff across both phases have a thorough understanding of the continuum of language development.

133 In schools where leaders or staff do not always have a good enough knowledge about children's language development and learning, it is common for schools to introduce overly formal approaches to learning and teaching in the foundation phase before learners are ready. As a result, this can hinder, rather than support, learners' progress in language and literacy.

134 In the most effective schools, leaders use monitoring and evaluation activities purposefully to identify staff professional learning needs in language and literacy. In these schools, leaders focus on building a culture that is respectful, trusting and supportive. With these preconditions for success, they nurture staff and build the school's capacity to meet learners' needs and address inequalities in their language experiences and skills, through a wide range of beneficial professional learning activities. For example, leaders:

- invest in whole-staff training events with specialist practitioners or external providers, when appropriate
- prioritise frequent regular professional learning discussions on agreed language topics, with prior reading for staff
- arrange visits for staff to other schools to observe effective practice in situ
- support staff to undertake personal or small-group inquiry projects
- use peer observation, mentoring and coaching to support reflective practice and goal setting
- draw effectively on specialist support and opportunities for professional learning provided by their local authority or regional consortium
- work with partners, such as higher education institutions, to support staff to draw on research and evidence to inform their practice

135 In the best examples, leaders develop robust processes for reviewing the impact of professional learning on improving learners' language and literacy to ensure that they target resources effectively, for example through observing teaching and learning. In schools where professional development for language teaching is less well developed, although leaders monitor generic aspects of teaching they do not focus closely enough on subject-specific aspects of language teaching. This makes it difficult for leaders to

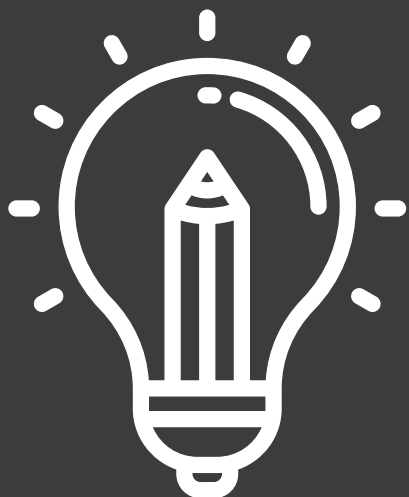
identify precisely teachers' or learning support assistants' professional learning needs so that these can be addressed to ensure that staff are more able to develop learners' language and literacy skills.

- 136** In general, local authorities and regional consortia provide appropriate support to settings and schools to build their capacity and expertise in language and literacy. In the best examples, local authorities provide worthwhile professional learning programmes to support leaders and staff in settings and schools to improve their knowledge of specialist pedagogy for addressing learners' specific speech and language needs. For example, a suite of courses help practitioners to understand how to support learners' receptive and expressive language skills, how to use visual strategies to support communication and how to assess learners' progress. You can read about how Flintshire local authority has developed a **specialist language support programme** for its settings and schools on our website. Where there are shortcomings in local authorities' and regional consortia's provision, the training and support is often generic and not always personalised sufficiently or matched to individual schools' needs.
- 137** Recently, regional consortia have provided a range of professional learning opportunities to support schools to develop learners' listening and speaking skills across all age phases. For example, they promote oracy projects, to improve learners' use of language and talk for different purposes through science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) activities. Currently, regional consortia are beginning to consider how they can support settings and schools to work collaboratively more successfully across age phases, to tackle important areas for improvement in learners' language and literacy, such as their vocabulary and spelling. For instance, they use conferences and 'e-learning' programmes to help settings and schools explore issues and ways of reducing the impact of disadvantage on learners' achievements in language and literacy. This work is at an early stage of development.



Supplementary material

Examples of effective provision for language and literacy



The learning environment and planning for learning

Case study 1

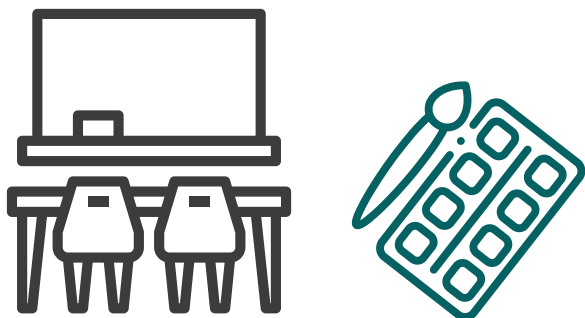
Context

Designing the learning environment to support independent language learning across the primary school

What do practitioners do?

The school adopts a common approach to organising its classrooms and outdoor areas into helpful learning zones that support learners' skill development well.

There are similar approaches across classes in how teachers organise resources for learners, taking their stage of language development into account. For example, in the language zone, learners of all ages use helpful displays of vocabulary, spelling and sentence structures, writing scaffolds and individualised learner targets to support them to work independently on their tasks. Support for language features strongly across other zones, such as the 'creative' and 'discovery' areas.





From the theme, 'Will you read me a story?' learners in the reception class read the familiar story of the Three Little Pigs in the language zone and create a shared pictorial map to recall it orally.

They make the houses of sticks, straw and bricks in the forest school, using adjectives to describe their houses. Using the real-life context of Storm Ciara that destroyed their houses in the school grounds, they discuss how the pigs might have felt after the wolf ruined all their hard work.



Learners in key stage 2 learn through carefully-crafted cross-curricular language and literacy 'missions' in a similar way to the 'challenges' provided in the foundation phase.

They generate ideas for cross-curricular topics, which their teachers then 'transform' into skill-based 'missions' that learners complete over four afternoons a week.

Your mission is to discover the difference between fiction and non-fiction books.

Mission part one: Using the Venn diagram, look at the two texts. Both give the same information in the same way. Sort the text features, deciding whether they are a feature of fiction texts, non-fiction texts or both.

Mission part two: Read the graphic novel. Create a storyboard for a fiction book on the 'Digestive System' and a non-fiction version. Identify the presentational features that will be in both.



Teachers ensure that learners understand the learning intentions for the tasks and learners work together to generate success criteria for each one. There is one teacher-led mission and one mission supported by the teaching assistant and four independent missions that always include at least one outdoor learning experience.

As learners are taught the features of genres and different writing forms effectively in dedicated literacy lessons, they are able to use the genre-specific support tools in the language zone to help them write effectively for different purposes across the curriculum.

What is the impact?

A consistent approach to the learning environment from class to class helps learners to become used to accessing resources independently to work on challenges in groups.

Learners use a wide range of materials confidently, including whiteboards, flipcharts and apps to plan and record their learning. They check their progress against the success criteria regularly, without teacher support. As a result, most have highly developed planning and research skills.

Most learners develop the ability to summarise main ideas from written texts using succinct language, as they share their ideas and make joint contributions to the missions.

- Developing learners' ability to organise and manage their learning effectively and independently
- Providing challenge at an appropriate level and motivating learners to accept the challenge

Case study 2

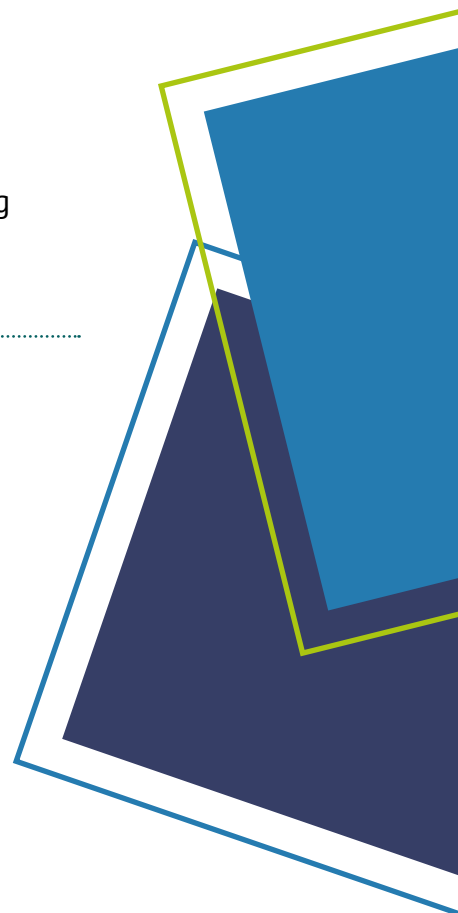
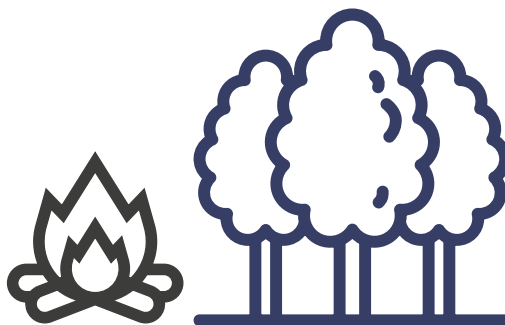
Context

Planning effective use of the local area and forest school to develop learners' language and literacy skills

What do practitioners do?

Teachers in Pembrey Community Primary School use consistent approaches to planning for progressive language development in each of the strands of language and literacy for all learners. This includes the use of:

- a story (spoken or written) as a stimulus for language learning across all curriculum areas
- the outdoors and the local area to develop listening and speaking skills
- role play, drama and discussion
- rhymes, poems and songs
- oral language experiences for their own sake and to stimulate writing
- learners' ideas about what they want to learn





In Year 6, teachers and learners plan a series of lessons that integrate effectively the development of learners' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The learner-led topic begins with a visit to the local shipwrecks on Cefn Sidan Beach to explore a local Welsh legend, 'Gwyr y Bwyelli Bach'/'The Men With Little Hatchets – A Tale of Looting on Pembrey Sands'.

Following the visit, Year 6 pupils create a large visual 'map' of the narrative that they display in the school grounds. With support from specially trained learning support assistants, who light a fire, learners use their forest school area to 'stage' a dramatic retelling of the story, using the large outdoor sandpit to evoke the events that took place on the beach.

They work enthusiastically as a class to take on different roles, such as narrators, looters and the ship's crew, performing the pirates' tale as a chorus. Learners explore how to use gesture, movement, music, rhyme and voice to engage an audience in a dramatic representation, and do so highly effectively in their class performance.

Subsequently, teachers use this exciting learning experience as a stimulus for writing, where learners compose diary entries, imagining what it must have been like the day after the looting on Pembrey sands.

What is the impact?

Staff plan exciting learning experiences in the outdoors that capture older learners' imagination and develop their listening, speaking and writing skills successfully in purposeful, language-rich contexts. Learners progress their knowledge and skills to adapt their language for audience and purpose.

These experiences help learners to develop their own creative talents and performance skills as part of the Expressive Arts area of learning and experience. The activities also encourage them to engage their imagination and senses and explore, refine and communicate their ideas. Performing in role helps to build learners' confidence and support their writing.

- Planning opportunities for learners of all ages to explore oral traditions of storytelling, poetry and rhyme in the context of Welsh tales, history and culture
- Making purposeful links between Languages, Literacy and Communication and the Expressive Arts area of learning and experience

Case study 3

Context

Developing consistency and progression in language learning through whole-school planning

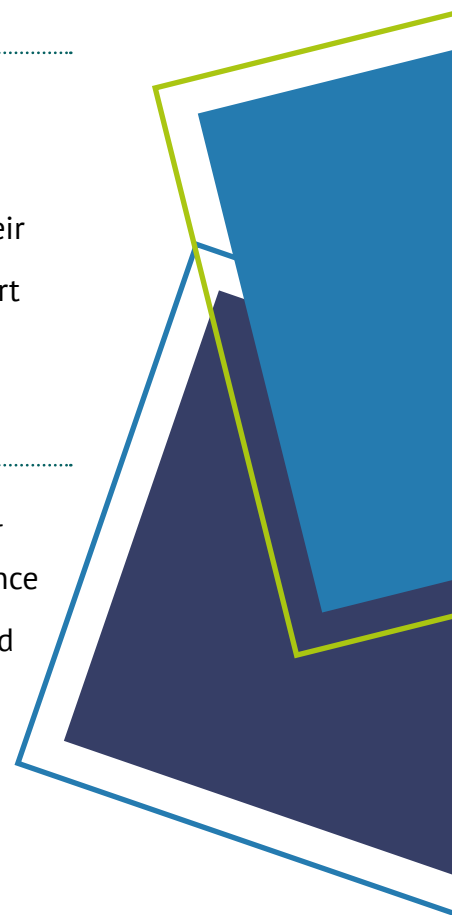
What do practitioners do?

A school's Languages, Literacy and Communication team map out opportunities for learners in each year group to develop, apply and extend their literacy skills each term, using the programmes of study and the literacy framework.

Subsequently, teachers use this overview as a starting point for developing their own curriculum maps, which the literacy team oversees to check for progression, breadth and depth of language learning.

The curriculum maps set out where the discrete teaching of specific language and literacy skills takes place for each year group and then identifies literacy 'rich' opportunities for learners to apply and extend their skills across the curriculum. Staff use a range of resources well to support their planning of language and literacy activities that enable learners to make progress in the identified skills.

Teachers plan together effectively to ensure progression in learners' skill development for specific aspects of language and literacy, such as sentence construction and spelling. They identify which vocabulary learners should encounter through teaching writing genres in each year group. In



addition, they map out where they build upon learners' prior knowledge of the features of different genres, each time learners meet the genre, as they move through the school, for example introducing increasingly varied sentence structures.

What is the impact?

The school's approach to planning helps to ensure that staff expectations of learners' knowledge and skills are suitably high, for example in how learners organise and structure their writing in a range of texts and the language they use. This has helped to improve standards for learners at the transition point from Year 2 to Year 3.

It has also helped teachers in all classes to plan greater challenge for more able learners, as they have a clearer understanding of the continuum of language learning. By Year 6, more able learners develop a personal style of writing successfully and they experiment with adapting text forms, such as transforming a narrative into a film script.

Case study 4

Context

Organising the curriculum to develop learners' knowledge and vocabulary about their local area

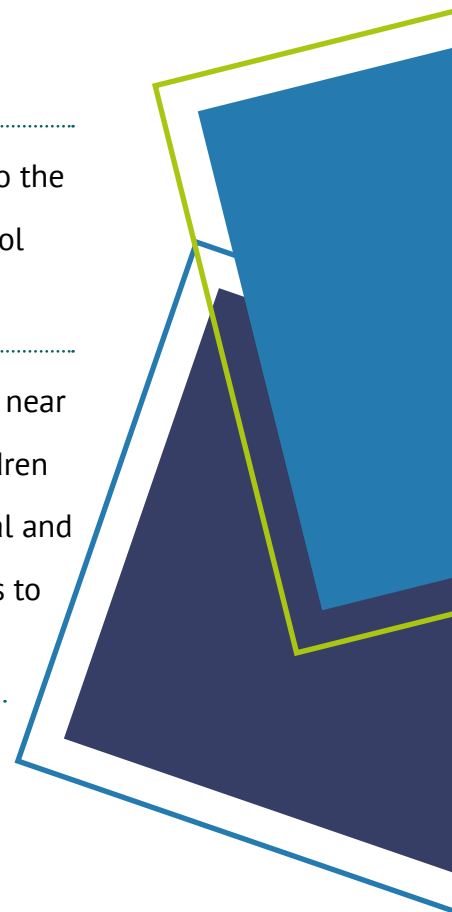
What do practitioners do?

Teachers from Mount Stuart Primary School in Cardiff Bay have organised the curriculum to ensure that learners acquire a knowledge and vocabulary about their local area.

They use the local area extensively for trips and visits and plan whole school themes for each term that allow them to explore their locality in detail. For example, the school's 'heritage' theme provides rich learning experiences for learners and worthwhile opportunities to extend and enhance their vocabulary in relevant and interesting local contexts.

For the very youngest children in the school, a 'visit' may entail a trip into the school playground with an adult to introduce vocabulary about the school environment and history of the school.

As children get older, teachers make good use of the variety of locations near to the school to develop learners' language. For example, groups of children visit nearby restaurants to learn the vocabulary necessary to order a meal and the local theatre to experience live performances and widen their access to new words.





They use activities such as camping outdoors to provide experiences that learners can talk and write about.

.....

This work permeates the curriculum. For example, the heritage topic provides meaningful opportunities for learners to learn about immigration into Cardiff as a result of the building of Cardiff Docks.

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What is the impact?

.....

Through this work, learners acquire new vocabulary and have good opportunities to rehearse and refine its use in meaningful contexts.

For example, older learners use words such as ‘annihilation’ and ‘debris’ effectively during drama lessons, when learning about the impact of the Second World War on the lives of people who lived in the area in the 1940s.

They use new vocabulary successfully in their writing, for example when explaining the importance of the local docks to the coal trade.

- Planning authentic contexts for language learning
- Helping learners to reflect on their local cultural heritage and develop their own sense of Welsh identity

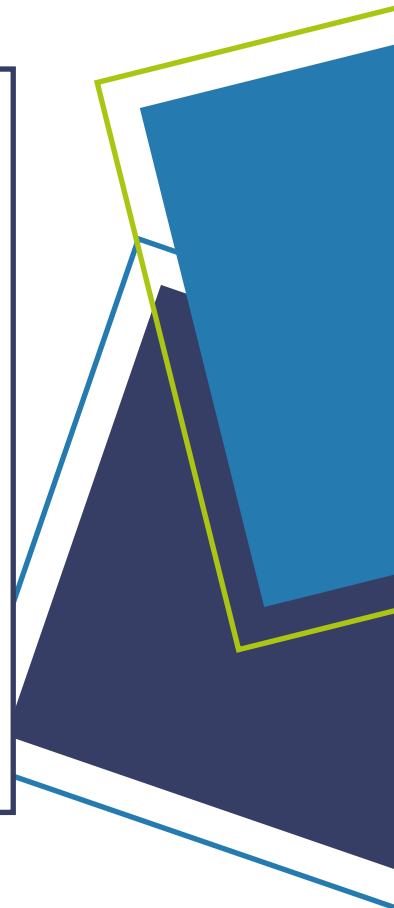
Case study 5

Context

Using 'focus weeks' to provide learners from nursery to Year 6 to 'dig down' into an aspect of learning in language and literacy

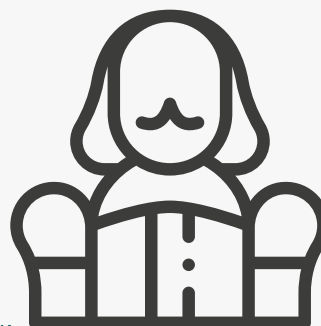
What do practitioners do?

For the past ten years, Ewloe Green Primary School in Flintshire has held 'focus weeks' where learners are immersed in a particular subject or curriculum area. During these weeks, the emphasis is on experiential learning and providing an opportunity for learners to engage more deeply with an aspect of learning. All learners are involved in the focus weeks, from nursery to Year 6.



For two weeks, there is a whole school focus on language and literacy linked with developing learners' expressive skills. In previous years, the focus has been on developing learners' vocabulary and creative writing skills through a detailed study of Shakespeare's plays.

This year, learners in each year group have chosen a tale from the Mabinogion to work on. They identify key themes and edit the original story to a manageable length. They begin to write a script, developing characters and drafting scenes in their groups in class. They perform their drafts for their peers who provide constructive feedback to help them improve their work. Then, each year group works to complete their script, allocate roles and prepare for their performance.



What is the impact?

Making this a whole school project brings life, excitement and momentum to learners' work. The process gives all learners a clear purpose for writing and developing their speaking skills, as they create their own piece of literature and prepare to perform it.

Nearly all learners become fully involved in developing work of a high standard. They push the boundaries of their learning and often achieve far more than they thought possible. Learners talk passionately about the different characters in the stories and many become confident performers.

Teaching and assessment

Examples of effective practice in:

- developing learners' listening and speaking, reading and writing skills
- developing learners' vocabulary

Case study **1**

Context

Supporting language development through creative play in a nursery class

What do practitioners do?

Practitioners model language in role play well to support children's speech and language development, for example when pretending to board and fly an aeroplane.



They introduce new related language and ask questions that encourage children to think for themselves and move their language learning on through imaginative play. They assess learners' understanding of common prepositions, such as 'on', 'under', 'front' and 'behind'.

What is the impact?

Children learn to follow and give multi-step instructions, for instance when 'the flight attendant' asks the passengers to put their bags in the locker, sit down and fasten their seat belts.

Thoughtful, adult interaction benefits children's social and communication skills, as they learn to use eye contact, take turns and listen to each other.

Case study 2

Context

Role modelling language and providing practical experiences to support learners' spoken and written language development

What do practitioners do?

Staff in an urban school with a high proportion of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds identify that many children starting school have poor communication skills.



Staff take time to develop relationships with the children, to play alongside them, and to model key vocabulary.

For instance, during the first half term they model how to use the role-play area. They use this to introduce children to descriptive and instructional language for cooking, using sequenced photographs to support the activity. Practitioners repeat key words and talk explicitly about how to follow a recipe as they model how to cook.

Staff recognise that many children have a narrow range of life experiences, so they simulate different experiences using the school's outdoor environment. For example, they 'visit the seaside' using the sandpit and water area, where learners use sound buttons to listen to instructions on how to build sandcastles and talk about their experience of the feeling of sand and water.

Subsequently, they recreate their 'visit to the seaside' during block play. Learners use these practical experiences to develop their own descriptive writing about the seaside.



What is the impact?

Children develop their receptive and expressive language skills through carefully planned one-to-one or small-group interactions that widen the scope of their experiences. This helps children to give and receive simple instructions and to describe their real or imagined experiences. Practitioners help them to make links between spoken and written language to support their early writing development.

Case study 3

Context

Using assessment effectively to improve young learners' listening skills

What do practitioners do?

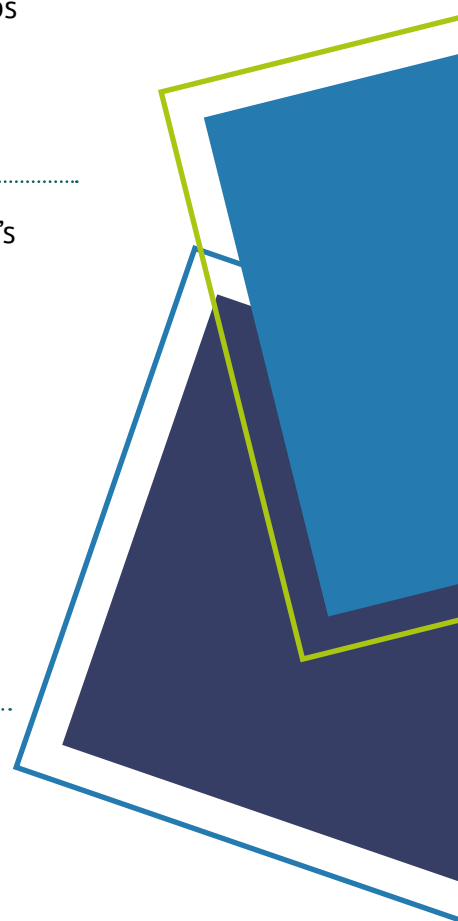
At Woodlands Primary School in Torfaen, leaders and staff identify that the listening skills of a minority of children are underdeveloped when they start school. Their assessments reveal that often children do not have the skills to isolate sounds they hear in the environment or in words. Frequently, they focus on the last word of a sentence or instruction and base their response only on that one word.

Practitioners recognise that children must be able to listen to three claps and repeat these, if learners are to make progress with learning simple consonant-vowel-consonant words.

The nursery class focuses on preliminary 'sound' work to attune children's listening.

This includes:

- playing listening games to identify everyday sounds outside and in the home
- copying simple patterns using clapping and musical instruments
- listening to, repeating and then carrying out simple instructions



What is the impact?

Practitioners help to lay essential foundations for developing children's ability to detect sounds, to discriminate between them, and to identify and understand them in words and sentences.

This helps to provide the building blocks for the development of learners' speech, phonological awareness and reading. Also, this improves children's ability to focus their attention and levels of concentration, for example to listen to a story.



Case study 4

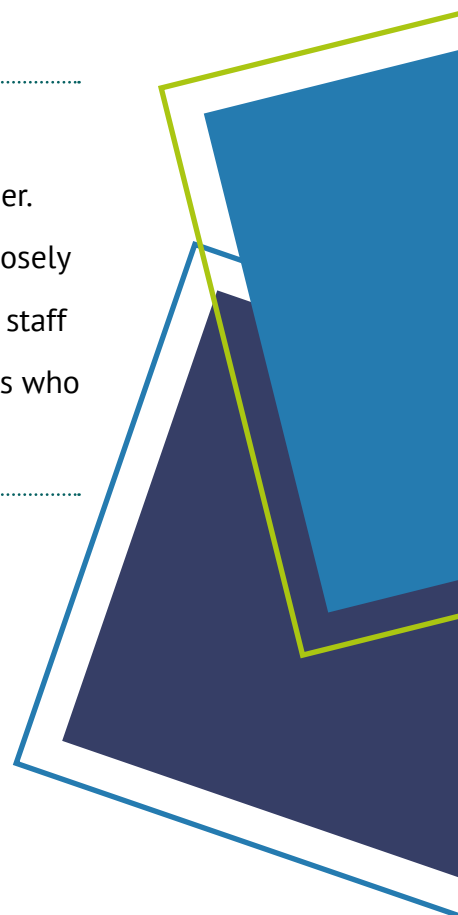
Context

Using a highly structured approach to assessing and developing learners' listening and speaking skills when they start school

What do practitioners do?

The listening and speaking skills of learners entering Ysgol Heulfan in Wrexham are well below those expected for their age. A high proportion have limited or no speech upon joining the nursery class and a few receive specialist support from speech and language therapists to develop their early language. Highly trained and experienced staff assess the receptive and expressive language skills of individual learners within the first two weeks of starting in the nursery class.

Subsequently, staff plan focused speech and communication activities, creating individual timetables, to match the specific needs of each learner. Through play-based and experiential learning activities, staff monitor closely the progress all learners make. Speech and language therapists support staff to carry out intervention programmes effectively with individual learners who need intensive support.



All staff in the foundation phase have completed training to use basic sign language with learners throughout the day.



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In the nursery classes, learners take part in daily 'Sing and Sign' sessions where staff encourage them to sign key vocabulary. Staff use the same vocabulary (spoken and signed) during every session to describe their daily classroom routines and the weather, which the children learn 'in rote'.

.....

The school provides sessions for parents on sign language, which it runs through a Family and Community Engagement project. Once learners become familiar with the signs, staff use Welsh words instead of English. This eases the children into a bilingual culture and they develop quickly the ability to use both languages alongside the signing. Eventually, when learners' speech becomes clear, and their understanding of the vocabulary in both languages is secure, staff stop using signs.

.....

In the nursery and reception classes, staff plan activities that concentrate on improving learners' clarity of speech and use of vocabulary. Staff speak to individual learners at a level appropriate to their stage of language development. They encourage the correct pronunciation of words and support learners to develop grammatical structures well. For example, they model correct phrases, such as 'Yes, you went there' in response to a learner who says, 'I did went there'.

.....

Older key stage 2 learners visit the nursery classes regularly to engage with the younger children in short sessions or projects that help to develop younger learners' communication skills and older learners' ability to describe and explain. By modelling new vocabulary and extended sentence patterns, the younger children are eager to mimic and use these new skills within their own play.

During whole class teaching, teachers choose stories with repetitive language to promote and develop learners' listening and speaking skills. Usually, they read these stories with learners over a two-week period and learners design their own activities based around the stories. When learners show a readiness to learn about letters and their sounds, the school invites parents into the school to learn about phonemes alongside their children.

What is the impact?

The school's highly structured approach to assessing and developing learners' listening and speaking skills when they start school helps those with weak speech and communication skills to make rapid progress.

Through strategies, such as repetition and modelling and using other forms of communication, staff support learners well in becoming familiar with the patterns and rhythms of language in English and in Welsh.

Staff provide learners with frequent opportunities to hear and practise their skills, for instance through talking to peers, adults and older learners. This helps them to become increasingly able to respond positively to the language demands of the classroom.

Involving parents helps them to appreciate the experiences that their children need to develop their language and literacy skills, and supports them effectively to provide these.

- Providing opportunities for learners to participate in spontaneous and planned speaking with a range of peers and adults
- Building strong partnerships with parents and carers



Case study 5

Context

Using the local area and its history to develop learners' listening and speaking skills

What do practitioners do?

Having been asked what they would like to learn about, children in a rural non-maintained setting choose the topic of 'pirates'.



Practitioners then arrange a trip to the local beach where the children dress up as pirates and describe their appearance. They travel on the local bus, greeting the driver and buying their tickets. They collect shells, using their senses of sight and touch to describe their shapes, texture and colours, as well as 'walking the plank'!



Teachers in a primary school use local history to develop learners' listening, speaking and writing skills. In the theme 'Time Traveller', Year 5 learners travel back 50 years to a time when local residents opposed the Ministry of Defence's plans to turn Cefn Sidan sands in to a gunnery range. As part of their curriculum planning activities, learners identify that they wish to re-enact the protest.

Members of the local community visit the school to talk with learners and to answer their questions about these events. Learners create a script and banners to present their arguments at a protest rally, that they hold in the school grounds. They lead a community 'Save our sands' (SOS) walk with a well-known weather presenter from BBC Wales News, local councillors, community members and their parents.

What is the impact?

Using the local area provides a rich context for developing young children's vocabulary and helps to widen the range of topics they can discuss.

Describing their activities, making connections between events and experiences and providing explanations help to develop the structure of their spoken language, so that it begins to resemble adult-like sentences.

For older learners, a local historical event provides a real-life context for them to develop the language of social interaction, to use appropriate conventions when interviewing, to select vocabulary for impact, and to provide convincing arguments and evidence to support a point of view.

Case study 6

Context

Improving older learners' listening skills through topical issues

What do practitioners do?

Staff at Gaer Primary School in Newport use a range of teaching strategies to develop key stage 2 learners' abilities to listen respectfully to each other, to value each other's opinions and to listen carefully in order to develop further their viewpoints during group and class discussions.

For example, they use scaffolds, such as questions, to support learners to listen consciously and think deeply about an issue or problem.

They encourage learners to think in different ways – to consider facts, to provide an emotional response, to think about their own thinking approaches, to think creatively, to consider positive solutions and to consider challenges or weaknesses in an approach.

Where possible, staff link listening and speaking activities to topical subjects, for example 'Brexit'. They provide opportunities for learners to observe how established speakers, such as politicians and interviewers, listen and respond to questions, using facts and figures to support their position.

What is the impact?

These opportunities help learners to listen more closely to what their peers say, to monitor their understanding of what they hear, and to reflect and respond confidently, supporting their views with evidence.

Learners have recognised the importance of deliberate listening to influence and negotiate with others, and to consider their own assumptions and judgements.

This work has supported learners to develop their ability to present a measured and informed view in discussion writing, for example when writing letters about local issues.

- Learning to share thoughts and opinions showing empathy and respect
- Reflecting on choices of spoken and written language

Case study **7**

Context

Using a carousel of language and literacy activities to develop and refine learners' speaking, reading and writing skills

What do practitioners do?

Twice a week, each key stage 2 class takes part in a carousel of language and literacy activities to improve learners' reading comprehension and use of reading strategies, their sentence construction and editing skills, and listening and speaking for different purposes.

The teacher and learning support assistant provide direct teaching to groups, while the other groups work independently to practise and consolidate their skills. All activities are relevant to the class topic or literacy theme and challenge learners. For example, in reading, staff provide differentiated sets of questions that develop learners' inferential, evaluative and appreciation skills.

Staff model the use of these questions during their teaching sessions, which then enables learners to use these independently and with each other. These questions relate closely to the expectations in the school's language and literacy scheme of work and the emphasis is on evidence of learners' understanding through their verbal responses, rather than through written answers.



Subsequently, learners use these questions as prompts to create verbal book reviews that they record using an app for their peers. These are available for all learners to listen to, to help them make their book choices.

What is the impact?

From their formative assessment of learners' progress in language and literacy lessons, teachers identify precise skills for improvement in the twice-weekly carousel of activities.

This enables teachers to address gaps in learners' knowledge and understanding, to teach core skills to small groups of learners and to consolidate learning through providing opportunities for learners to practise their skills. Furthermore, learners develop the ability to work independently at an appropriately challenging level.

Teachers make effective use of learners' audio and video recordings from the carousel activities to assess their progress in the independent listening, speaking and reading tasks, as well as their writing.

Case study 8

Context

Using 'think alouds' (Harvey and Goudvis, 2013) to model reading strategies to learners

What do practitioners do?

Teachers explain to learners in the foundation phase that readers have two voices: a 'speaking' voice and a 'thinking' voice.

The speaking voice is the voice people hear when they read aloud. The 'thinking' voice is the voice in their head that other people cannot hear but good readers pay attention to this voice when they are reading. Teachers model how they listen to their thinking voice by verbalising their thoughts. For example:



When I see the letter 'c', I know it can sound 'k' as in cat but it can also sound 's' like in city...



When I read this part of the story, I start to think about...



My thinking voice is making me wonder if this is a 'right there' question, where I can find the answer right there in the book, or if the answer needs to come from me...



I'm struggling to read this word, so I think I need to use a strategy to help me. I'm going to read ahead to the end of the sentence to see if I can make sense of what the word might be...



'On this page, there is no writing, but there is a detailed picture. From this picture, I can see...Maybe, the author is trying to give us information about how the character is feeling, without writing any words down. I think her expression tells me...'



In key stage 2, teachers build on this language of thinking to support learners to develop more advanced reading skills, such as synthesising and evaluating. For instance:

I know already that summarising means pulling out the key ideas and rewriting them into a short paragraph in my own words. Synthesising is a bit like adding another layer to our reading, so I need to combine ideas from different texts and think about them. I think I'll approach this by...



I think I need to be careful when reading this newspaper article for my research on the Second World War. Is everything written here fact? Maybe it's the writer's opinion or maybe it's biased in some way? The reasons for that could be...



What is the impact?

By making explicit the skills effective readers apply when they read, teachers help learners to develop a vocabulary about reading and thinking.

This modelling of thinking processes supports learners to apply a wide range of reading strategies when they read text independently, for example how to use clues to make sense of what they read.

It helps learners to monitor their understanding of a text as they read and to become critical and discerning readers.

- Explicit modelling to develop learners' metacognitive skills
- Teachers build these approaches into everyday teaching and learning activities



Case study 9

Context

Using poetry to develop learners' reading and speaking skills in Years 5 and 6

What do practitioners do?

Teachers at Tywyn Primary School build a sequence of language lessons, using the ballad 'Timothy Winters' by Charles Causley, to develop learners' advanced reading skills of inference, deduction, evaluation and appreciation.

They plan activities carefully to give learners a deeper understanding of characters and to support them to use this understanding to experiment with characterisation and develop their ability to perform in role.

Through effective questioning and whole-class discussion, teachers support learners to analyse the poem to understand its characters and the challenging underlying themes. Learners are encouraged to express their opinions by referring to and quoting directly from the text to support their views, for example when discussing the young boy's malnourishment. Following this, teachers plan a series of activities to look at how texts change when they are adapted for different media and audiences.

Learners analyse an animated version of the poem and explore how the spoken elements work together with images, music, sound effects and silence. Teachers' questioning extends learners to develop their evaluation and appreciation skills, through considering the impact of the animator's creative choices on telling the story of Timothy Winters.

Teachers set learners the challenge of using their knowledge and understanding of the poem to take on the role of a specific character and provide a witness statement to a police officer on the treatment of Timothy Winters.



Learners work together to create their own success criteria for the group drama challenge. They plan their roles, referring to the success criteria, and experiment with language, quoting extracts from the poem to bring their characters to life. More able learners make calculated language choices to appeal emotionally to their audience. Each group performs its dramatic interpretation of 'Timothy Winters' and learners use the success criteria to evaluate their effectiveness.

What is the impact?

Through high-quality teaching and carefully planned activities, in which reading, listening and speaking skills complement one another, learners develop a mature understanding and interpretation of text.

They develop empathy for characters, consider challenging themes and explore how poets and animators use creative devices to impact on an audience, for example through the choice of imagery, vocabulary, camera angles, colour and music.

These activities help to develop learners' inference and deduction skills to a high level and support them to engage in lively discussions to hone their evaluation and appreciation skills.

Learners make adventurous vocabulary choices themselves in their dramatic performances, showing sophisticated understanding of the power and effect of spoken language on the listener, in their attempts to provoke empathy for Timothy Winters' plight.

Learners use the success criteria purposefully to provide each other with constructive criticism during their rehearsals and after their final performances.

- Using multimodal and challenging texts to foster learners' enjoyment of purposeful reading and viewing

Case study 10

Context

Using technology and formative assessment effectively to improve the quality of learners' writing

What do practitioners do?

Through its self-evaluation processes, leaders and staff at Trinant Primary School identified that verbal feedback to learners of all ages has a greater impact on their progress in language and literacy than lengthy written feedback.

They use designated professional learning time to consider how they might integrate feedback better into the writing process, and encourage learners to take responsibility for identifying and making improvements to their writing.

All classes from Year 2 to Year 6 introduce the 'flag and tag' approach during lesson 'pit stops' in writing sessions. Teachers direct learners to specific aspects of the writing success criteria and ask them to pause and review their work in progress. If they have achieved that aspect of the success criteria through their writing, they 'flag this up' using a special pen. If they have not yet achieved it, they 'tag it on' to improve their writing.

Teachers use a visualiser effectively to share learners' work with the class and support this 'in the moment' reflection and improvement process. Where appropriate, the teacher uses this 'pit stop' as an opportunity for the direct teaching of an aspect of writing, for example how to combine simple sentences to form a multi-clause sentence.

What is the impact?

This approach encourages learners to reflect purposefully on success criteria when writing for a particular purpose and audience.

Sharing and evaluating their work in progress helps to ensure that learners engage with feedback and learn from it. Consequently, they can 'hone' specific aspects of their writing successfully.

The time teachers build in to lessons for learners to redraft and refine their writing helps them develop a good understanding of writing 'as a process' and why it is important to make changes to improve it.



Case study 11

Context

Three schools' approaches to developing learners' spelling through high-quality professional learning for staff

What do practitioners do?

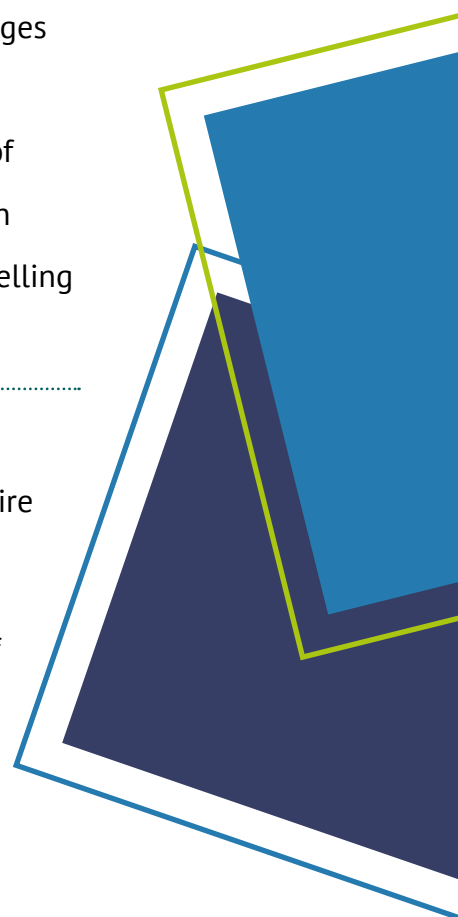
School A

Leaders and staff in a primary school recognise that learners' spelling is a weakness and this becomes a priority in the school's improvement plan. Staff use a series of weekly whole-staff professional learning sessions to find out more about theories of spelling development.

They debate theories that have focused on spelling as developing in stages (for example, Gentry 1982) and more recent research that suggests the staged approach oversimplifies how children develop their knowledge of spelling. They consider the research carefully and think about learners in their classes, identifying that some show aspects of several stages of spelling simultaneously.

As a team, they reach the consensus that they need to explore teaching approaches, which focus on developing strategies for spelling, that require learners to use:

- a combination of **phonological knowledge** (knowledge of the units of sound that make words)



- **orthographic knowledge** (understanding of how spoken language is represented in print)
 - **morphological knowledge** (knowledge of parts of words and word patterns)
-

Staff identify that they need to spend more time teaching learners about prefixes, suffixes and word roots. In addition, they agree to work on modelling and developing learners' use of the following spelling strategies:

- sounding words out
 - using the words they already know they can spell (for example, high frequency words)
 - dividing words into syllables
 - knowing common prefixes and suffixes and what they mean
 - exploring letter strings and word patterns
 - using knowledge of word structures and meaning (for example, word origins)
 - using known spellings as the basis for spelling correctly other words with similar patterns or building them from their meaning
 - predicting the most likely order of letters in words (for example, that u is likely to follow q)
 - using visual strategies to look at the shape and length of words
 - investigating spelling 'rules', their exceptions and oddities (for example, 'in' becomes 'im' before a root word starting with m or p, as in 'impossible')
 - using mnemonics for remembering tricky words
-

School B

In a junior school, staff focus on improving their knowledge of how the spelling system works through a range of professional learning activities. This gives them the skills and confidence to analyse learners' spelling errors and to consider what these errors tell them about learners' stage of spelling development.

Together, staff decide that they will try out not giving written feedback on spelling errors when learners produce extended writing. Instead, they will analyse spelling across groups of learners in their classes, identifying common errors and patterns of misspellings. They will use this to guide their subsequent teaching of spelling for a half-term.

During the pilot they provide regular teaching sessions on aspects of spelling, using the context of the current curriculum topics and shared texts. During writing activities, staff support learners to review and identify where they have spelled words correctly, where previously they made errors, and they help learners to use their knowledge from the teaching sessions to correct their misspellings.

Appendix 4 includes types of spelling errors and the teaching strategies that might support learners to improve their spelling.

School C

Every week, learners take home a list of ten words to learn to spell. Teachers choose the words and, in general, match them well to learners' current spelling ability. Learners receive homework where they write each word in a sentence and then the teacher tests them on their spelling of these words at the end of the week.

Staff recognise, however, that often learners do not transfer their knowledge of these spellings to their independent writing. In addition, a few parents of children in key stage 2, have commented that the spelling homework demotivates their children.

Staff agree actions to aim to address the issues raised through the school's self-evaluation processes. They provide spelling workshops for parents, where they demonstrate different strategies to help learners practise and learn spellings. For example, they model how to create crosswords, spelling rhymes and 'spell-a-me-doodles'. They show parents how to identify key features of words to help focus children's attention on the 'tricky' parts of words. They introduce proofreading activities, as one of a variety of spelling homework activities, linked to their class topics.

Instead of a weekly spelling test, teachers provide no more than five spellings for learners to work on, tailored to their needs. Learners work on these with their parents, using the range of activities they have been taught, in their 'home spelling journal'.

Staff assess learners' progress through their everyday writing for a unit of work and provide them with formative feedback on their spelling progress, which they share with their parents using an app.

What is the impact?

Improving practitioners' knowledge and understanding of spelling in the English language and its complexity helps them to develop effective teaching and learning approaches to improve learners' spelling, as an explicit aspect of their writing development.

In turn, this helps to improve learners' ability to draw independently on a range of strategies to spell accurately. They develop the confidence to use their knowledge of letter-sound relationships, word parts, letter patterns and word origins to 'have a go' and monitor their own spelling.

When teachers plan interesting and relevant learning experiences that engage learners effectively, such as investigating word origins and problem-solving spelling 'rules', this helps to foster learners' curiosity in words and writing.

By working closely with parents, staff help to develop effective spelling pedagogy in school and at home. This is also beneficial for tackling misconceptions about spelling and exploring issues about the common primary school practice of weekly spelling 'tests'.

Case study 12

Context

Using a combination of evidence-based approaches to develop learners' composition and transcription skills to a high standard

What do practitioners do?

Teachers in Gaer Primary School use a combination of tightly structured approaches to writing. This includes the direct teaching of writing genres modelled on sample texts, as well as approaches that focus on writing as a process and providing learners with choices about what they write and how they write.

All language and literacy tasks are based around a text (written or visual) or an artefact. These often unusual choices engage and stimulate learners' interests effectively. Usually, teachers plan the development of learners' writing around a specific text type over a period of a fortnight. They expose learners to effective models of writing and engage them in exploring and understanding their structure, organisation and language features. They teach learners how to make effective use of 'thinking maps' to help plan and structure their ideas, and they establish clear and high expectations for learners' writing.

Teachers integrate purposeful, contextualised opportunities for learners to focus on sentence construction and 'word-level' work. For example, they use 'shades of meaning' activities to introduce learners to new vocabulary,



both descriptive and technical, relevant to the text type. This helps learners to understand the different meanings of a word, as well as to connect words with similar meanings. For example, learners in Year 2 explore the meaning of 'peckish', 'famished', 'ravenous' and 'starving' in relation to 'hungry'.

Teachers balance this structured approach to teaching writing, with opportunities for learners to make their own choices about the content, genre, presentation and audience for their writing in 'write what you want weeks'. They model 'short burst' writing effectively to help learners catch their main ideas, without being overly concerned about the accuracy of their grammar, punctuation and spelling. They support learners through the writing process, using a 'get it down – go back and edit' approach. Effective teacher feedback and peer assessment against precise success criteria help learners to revise and refine their writing successfully.

What is the impact?

Teaching builds effectively learners' knowledge, understanding and skills to write for different purposes and audiences in different genres.

Through the successful modelling of writing strategies and use of resources, teachers enable learners to make their own decisions about which tools to use to help them plan and draft their writing. For example, learners choose to use a 'flow map' to order and sequence information for an explanation text or a 'double bubble map' to compare sides of an argument for discursive writing.

The structured integration of activities in relevant contexts that help to develop learners' transcription skills means that most learners become confident, competent and independent writers by the end of key stage 2.

Case study 13

Context

Developing learners' vocabulary through planned and spontaneous learning experiences in the foundation phase

What do practitioners do?

In the foundation phase, adults make frequent modelling of precise language linked to familiar concepts, classroom routines and activities, a visible part of children's daily learning experiences.

In a non-maintained setting, staff take pictures of children during the day to create a nursery book.

They use this book to help the children to recall and talk about what they have done during the day and to model specific vocabulary. For example, children recall the texture of pumpkins when they scooped out the flesh. Adults help them to make links with mathematical vocabulary, such as 'heavy and light' and 'full and empty'.

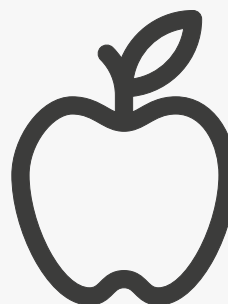


In a nursery school, practitioners monitor individual learners' understanding and use of vocabulary closely in the role play café.

They practise words and language patterns with the children prior to visiting cafés in the community, where they use and apply their skills in a real-life context to order food and drinks.



In a reception class, the teacher asks learners to 'give out' the healthy snacks and subsequently thanks them for distributing them sensibly, linking the words for a few days until all learners understand the meaning of 'distribute'.



Learners in a Year 1 class read *The Tiger Who Lost His Stripes* by Anthony Paul.

The teacher identifies 'stately', 'dignified', 'splendid' and 'pally' as target words to explore with learners to expand their knowledge of groups of related words. She extends more able learners by asking which word might be the most appropriate choice, and to explain why: 'Would it be best to describe the tiger as determined, persistent or patient?'





When planning learning, teachers identify which topic-specific vocabulary they will introduce to learners across areas of learning. They take advantage of authentic opportunities to develop learners' knowledge about words and languages.

Year 2 learners are enthused by their 'castles' topic. Most use terms, such as 'portcullis' and 'moat', confidently in their talk and in their writing. As they research the different types of castles, they ask to learn more about their design.

Their teacher introduces them to more advanced technical vocabulary to describe the castles' features, such as 'bastion' and 'trebuchet'. This leads learners to ask questions about the history and origin of these words from the Middle Ages. More able learners relate them to words they already know, for example making connections between the design of the 'trebuchet' and the word 'bucket'.

Through enhanced and focused activities, the teacher gives learners time to use the new technical language independently. For example, they design, make and describe their own 'junk' model castles, and they write a fairytale 'with a twist' set in a castle.

What is the impact?

The deliberate, conscious attention to introducing words to learners, which are beyond their current knowledge but within their grasp, means that more sophisticated words become a natural part of classroom conversation and learning.

This helps to challenge learners, to foster their curiosity in words and to broaden their vocabulary. The depth, as well as breadth of learners' understanding of the new words, also increases. This is because adults have helped learners to link new with familiar words. They are able to connect the words with their prior knowledge and experiences (Armbuster, Lehr and Osborn, 2001).

Teachers plan interesting and authentic learning experiences that engage learners effectively. Learning about the history and origin of words, even at a young age, contributes successfully to raising learners' awareness of different languages, the similarities between them and their knowledge of where words have come from.

- Planning for word learning explicitly and taking advantage of child-initiated learning
- Having high expectations for learners' word knowledge and use
- Adults' use of language provides an important model for learners' vocabulary development

Case study 14

Context

Developing learners' vocabulary when writing to persuade in key stage 2

What do practitioners do?

As part of their topic on 'Our wonderful world', Year 5 learners decide they would like to write a letter to the local council about the amount of litter in the community park and children's playground.

They are concerned about the possible dangers of litter in the park for animals and young children, believing the council has not taken appropriate action to address the issue.



In response to learners' request, as part of planning for learning, the teacher considers:

- learners' previous experiences of talking or writing to persuade
- vocabulary linked to the topic that learners are already familiar with
- new vocabulary that is likely to appear frequently in texts on this topic
- words which will support learners to convey an idea in a more mature way
- vocabulary and features associated with the concept of 'persuasion', including an awareness of audience
- which high-quality texts will best support learners to develop their vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension

She identifies that learners have a good grasp of connectives to sequence arguments and information (firstly, in conclusion), to support their points (furthermore), to show a contrasting idea (instead, on the other hand) and to exemplify their view (for instance). However, learners' vocabulary linked to environmental issues is underdeveloped.

Currently, learners of all abilities, including those who are more able, do not use a sufficiently wide vocabulary when writing extended pieces. Therefore, the teacher identifies the following as key 'target' words for teaching:

hazardous, unfortunate, deprived, deteriorate, appealing, environment, conservation, preservation, regenerate, contaminated, toxic, discarded, decomposing, debris, detritus, recreation, accountable, detracts, maintain, imperative, sway, numerous, implore

The teacher thinks carefully about how she will explain each word in everyday language that pupils can understand, and which specific elements make each word different from other words, for instance how 'toxic' is different from 'hazardous'.

During the unit of work, she provides relevant opportunities for learners to talk about the meanings of the 'target' words, for example detritus, in the context of their topic and in different contexts. This helps them to draw on their developing understanding of the word meanings to select appropriate uses of the words. The teacher also focuses on helping pupils to develop their 'word consciousness' by looking at the relationships between words and their word parts. For example, they examine the Latin root '-tract' (meaning to pull or drag) in the words 'detracts' and 'attractive', when discussing the natural beauty of the park.

What is the impact?

The direct approach to teaching vocabulary within an authentic learning context helps learners to become more curious about words, and their rich and varied meanings.

Most learners provide nuanced explanations of the target words and give examples of how these can be used, when writing about the environment, or in other contexts.

During research for their writing, they seek out more advanced vocabulary. They share these words, and their possible uses, enthusiastically on the classroom 'literacy wall'.

Consequently, nearly all learners make sophisticated language choices and write persuasive letters successfully, which convey a compelling argument for the local authority to take action to reduce the impact of litter on their community park.

- Building on learners' prior knowledge and skills when writing for a specific purpose
- Identifying 'target' words for teaching vocabulary in context

Examples of effective practice in fostering a culture of reading

Case study 1

Context

Immersing children in traditional stories and rhymes

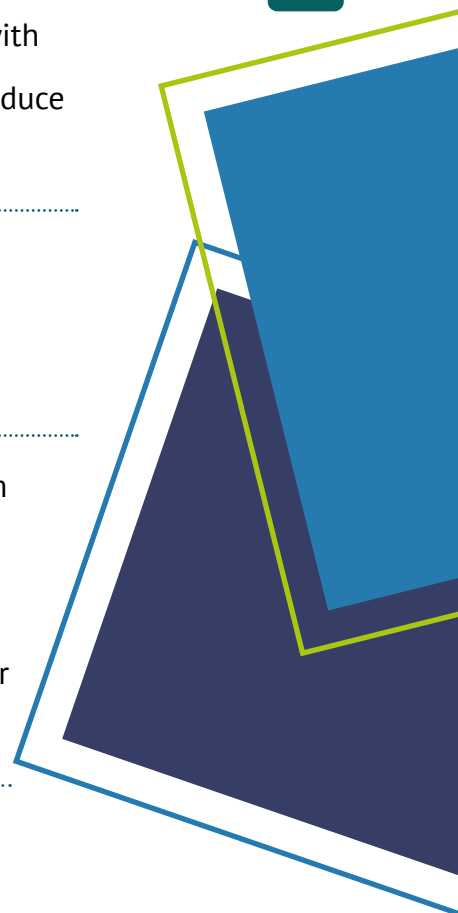
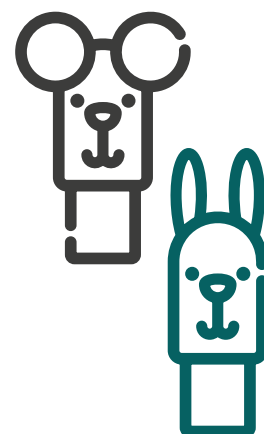
What do practitioners do?

Staff at Little Stars Nursery in Pontypool immerse children in traditional stories and rhymes. This builds their storytelling skills and enjoyment of books through opportunities to re-enact narratives with props and puppets in the setting and at home.

Adults teach and share a wide range of traditional stories and rhymes with the children. They unpick simple themes, talk about characters and introduce children to simple story language structures.

Children have the chance to browse through the books on their own in attractive reading corners, developing the skill of handling books independently.

Adults revisit the stories with the children, modelling how to retell them using puppets and props. The children re-enact the stories and rhymes, sometimes adding their own characters or experiences. Adults observe how the children interact with the narratives and listen carefully to their spoken language.



The setting encourages parents to borrow 'story sacks' with books to share with their children at home. They hold workshops to explain how to share the stories and rhymes with their children and how to use the props and resources. They provide guidance on how to extend the children's comprehension of familiar stories with open-ended questions.

What is the impact?

The act of reading regularly together and sharing stories in school and at home helps to foster the enjoyment of books at a young age. Children hear the inflections in speech and words as adults model expressive reading and storytelling. Subsequently, most children transfer the rich language of good-quality picture books into their retellings of stories and their role play. They enhance their memory when recalling key points of the plot and character names. The stories help to develop their imagination and creative thinking.

- Starting early: promoting books every day and ensuring children hear books read aloud
- Giving young children the opportunity to browse through books on their own

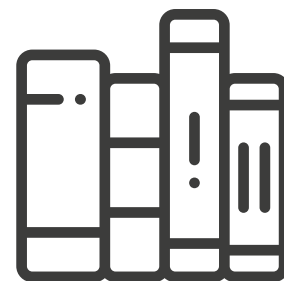
Case study 2

Context

Developing a shared reading culture between learners, parents and staff

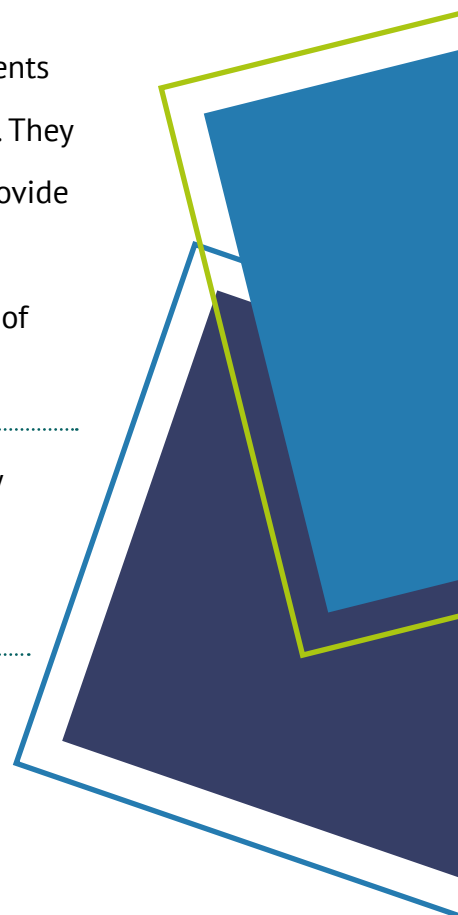
What do leaders and staff do?

Reading for pleasure is a current school improvement priority at Trinant Primary School. Leaders and staff have developed a range of initiatives to increase the whole school community's awareness of the importance of reading for enjoyment.



Trinant does not have its own community library, so through its partnership with Islwyn High School and a donation of books from its English department, the school has set up a lending library with a 'twist' for parents and families. At the planning stage, teachers read all the donated books. They write brief plot 'teasers', classifying the books according to genre and provide enjoyment ratings. They recognise that sometimes adults dismiss books by their covers at 'face value', so they wrap the books to add an element of surprise and attach their own ratings and blurbs.

The school recognises that teachers' own attitudes to reading are highly influential and teachers talk to learners regularly about their favourite books and the new books they are reading.



The school lending library has helped to engage parents, too, in conversations about books. Staff take the opportunity to talk to them about the books that they are reading when they greet children on the school gate in the morning and at the end of the day. They make recommendations to individual parents and engage in lively, informal conversations about the characters and plot development. A few parents have become avid readers. They discuss the books on social media and ‘follow’ the authors. There is now a waiting list for favourites.

What is the impact?

The school has sourced accessible books for parents to enjoy, which cater for different reading tastes and abilities.

Children see their parents, as well as their teachers, as ‘readers’, who become absorbed in books and enjoy talking about them.

This has helped to raise the status of reading for pleasure in the community and increased learners’ engagement with books in school and at home, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- Increasing learners’ reading for pleasure is a school improvement priority
- Prioritising engagement with parents and carers, particularly of disadvantaged learners, to support the development of a shared reading culture

Case study 3

Context

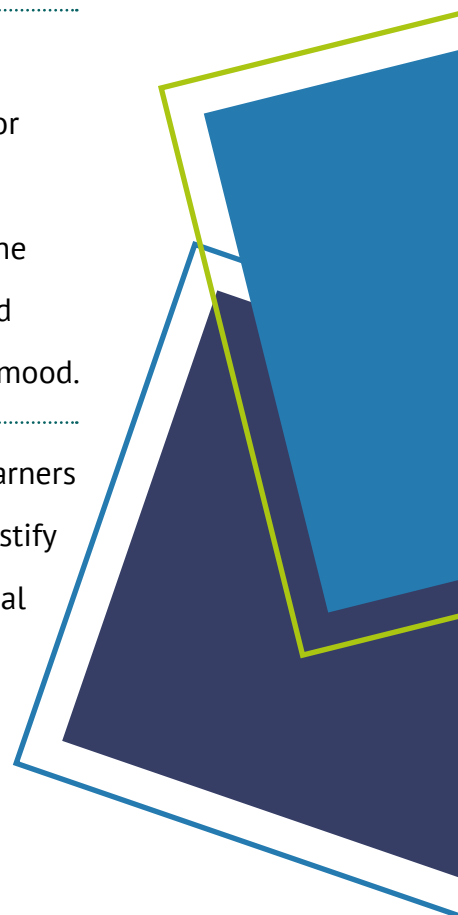
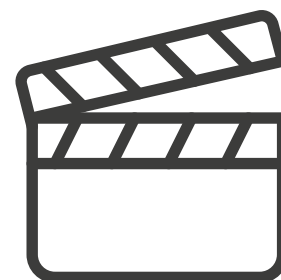
Using film to develop learners' literacy and digital skills

What do practitioners do?

Cwmrhydyceirw Primary School uses film to develop learners' knowledge and understanding of multimedia texts, and to refine their digital skills. The school adopts a seven-step approach to planning teaching and learning activities which develops learners' skills of prediction, inference and deduction, comprehension, writing, planning and pitching, film making, and culminates in a whole-school celebration. This seven-step process involves a range of activities that can be adapted appropriately for learners' age and ability, based upon the teacher's knowledge of a specific cohort of children.

Initially, teachers make effective use of prediction activities to engage and encourage learners to develop their listening and speaking skills. For example, they introduce them to the language of film, so that learners can use precise vocabulary to talk about their ideas. They explore how the elements of a film, such as its music or sound effects, have been selected deliberately to hint at what might happen to a character or to convey a mood.

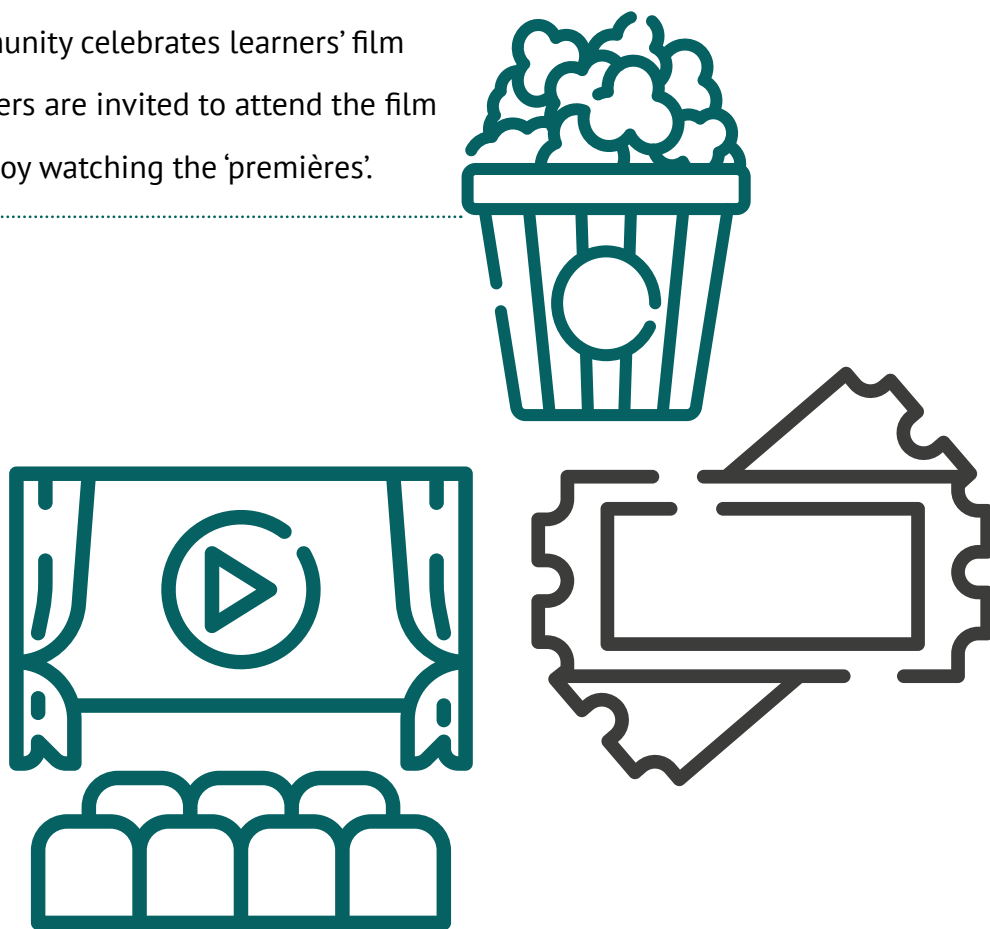
Teachers build on the development of these literacy skills by helping learners to develop their skills of inference and deduction, as they discuss and justify their own interpretations of films, making connections with their personal knowledge and experiences. Learners draw enthusiastically upon their auditory and sensory experiences of watching a film, when engaging



in the creative writing process. The stimulus of film encourages learners to use more descriptive, varied and exciting vocabulary in their writing and provides teachers with an engaging context for sentence construction activities.

The film making process provides further rich opportunities for learners to develop a broad range of listening and speaking skills. For example, they use persuasive techniques successfully to pitch their ideas, collaborate as script writers and rehearse their performances. During the film editing process, learners experiment with image and sound manipulation, discussing and selecting specific digital tools to create a desired effect. Using film as a focus within a safe environment, learners develop their understanding of copyright issues and age rating restrictions.

The whole school community celebrates learners' film making. Parents and carers are invited to attend the film festival and learners enjoy watching the 'premieres'.



What is the impact?

These carefully planned learning activities using film excite and challenge learners. Opportunities to share ideas about the way multimedia texts are constructed enable most learners, particularly middle and higher ability girls, who are often reluctant to contribute to discussions, to become more able, confident speakers.

Using film has removed obstacles for learners who struggle with the mechanics of reading. They have developed their ability to read and interpret images and sound, and this has had a positive impact on their comprehension of texts. Overall, learners include greater detail when providing written responses to the films. Their engagement with a film's visual images and their emotional connection to a film have improved their ability to recall details and to think deeply about its themes.

Learners' evaluation of their own and others' work reflects a developing understanding of the creative process, as well as 'product'. Film making tasks support learners to negotiate and build agreement to work towards a common goal. They take responsibility for organising their ideas and adopt specific roles. This helps to increase learners' self-esteem and develop their confidence.

- Using film to excite and challenge learners
- Developing skills of inference and deduction by making connections with personal knowledge and experiences
- Negotiating and building agreement to achieve a common goal

Case study 4

Context

Setting up a school's book award to champion diversity and inclusion through children's literature

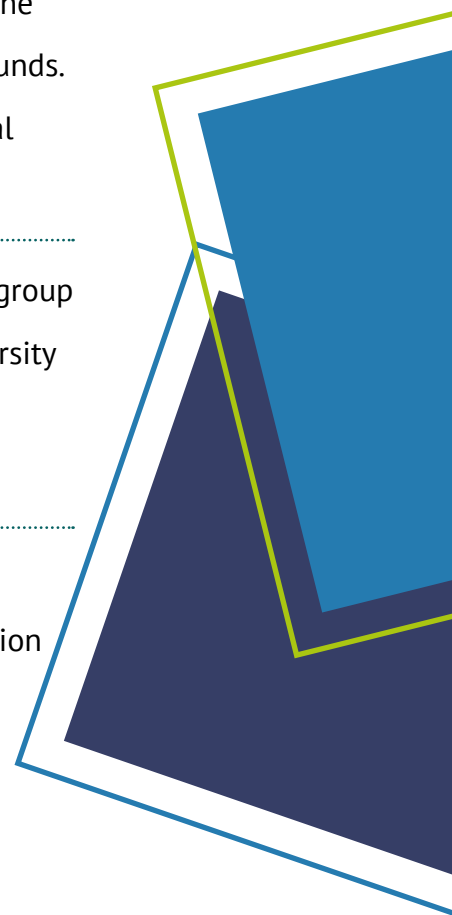
What do practitioners do?

Cogan Primary School has a wide range of language and literacy-related partnerships, including with the United Kingdom Literacy Association and Literature Wales. Over time, the headteacher and staff have developed an exceptionally strong reading culture in the school, where access to rich literature is an entitlement for all learners.

In 2019, staff and learners set up the school's own book award, to champion diversity and inclusion through children's literature. Learners attending the school come from a wide range of social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The school has a hearing resource base for children from across the local authority.

The school's co-ordinator for additional learning needs (ALNCo) leads a group of fifteen key stage 2 pupils, who take responsibility for considering diversity issues in their school and contribute to improving pupils' wellbeing and learning experiences.

Through professional enquiry, the ALNCo researched the value of using picture books to develop learners' love of reading, and their comprehension skills of evaluation and appreciation. She identified that the use of



English and Welsh picture books, across all ages in the primary school, can be a powerful tool for developing learners' vocabulary and reading for understanding, as well as fostering an enjoyment of books.

It occurred to staff that often there are children in their classes who do not see a character who looks like them in picture books, or whose experiences or circumstances they can relate to. Also, the ALNCo became aware of recent criticism of the publishing industry's lack of diverse representation in children's literature and considered how the school might take steps to address this through its own choices of picture book.

Together, the ALNCo and pupil group decided to set up and run its own national book award to promote diversity and inclusion.



Learners asked the parent teacher association to support their work and they received £100 to buy books to create their award 'long list'. With the help of the school's local bookshop in Penarth, learners selected twelve titles initially, using the following criteria:

- picture books suitable for mainly three to seven-year-olds
- books published between 1st March 2017 and 30 September 2018
- books with respect and inclusion as themes, or the representation of minority groups

Learners felt it was important that the content of the books was ethnically and/or culturally diverse and that they included non-stereotypical characters or characters with disabilities. They used the school website, a news page on the Literature Wales website and a social media campaign to launch the award.

The school's social media post (below) received attention and support from well-known children's authors, such as Michael Rosen, and the Children's Commissioner for Wales:

'We are a small South Wales primary school trying to do something BIG. We have 17 languages spoken, many pupils with disabilities and many kinds of families... it's why we created the Cogan Diversity Picture Book Award 2019.'



In total, the school received 68 titles from publishers that met the criteria for the award, which the 'diversity' pupil group and staff read. They set about providing opportunities for all learners across the school to become familiar with the books, so they could begin the judging process and whittle these down to a shortlist of seven titles. This involved sharing the books during lesson times, assemblies, break times and during a well-attended lunchtime book club.

Learners in all classes, guided by thoughtful questions, reviewed and rated the books. As well as enjoying the books for their own sake, older learners responded warmly to the responsibility of recommending books for a younger audience. They compared books in a variety of different ways, for example considering the appeal of the characters, the quality and impact of the illustrations on their own and in conjunction with text, and the clarity of the book's message or theme.

Learners discussed how best to share their comments about the books responsibly through social media, agreeing to discuss aspects they were less keen on privately through the judging process and to only publicise comments about the aspects of the books they liked through the school's social media accounts. Learners provided quotes on each title to share on the internet and posted book reviews on a children's book review website.

The school shared the shortlist of books with parents, governors and the wider community through social media, the local library and bookshop. In May 2019, Literature Wales announced the winner of the Cogan Diversity Picture Book Award 2019 on its website. The school presented the winning author and illustrator with trophies made by the children at an award ceremony in July 2019.

You can read more about the winning picture book on the Literature Wales website.

What is the impact?

The book award initiative enhanced an already strong reading culture within the school. It improved learners' and the wider community's interest in, and enthusiasm for, reading. The range of engaging picture books increased learners' self-selection of reading material and the amount of reading for pleasure taking place across the school. Also, it broadened children's awareness of different authors, illustrators, and new literature. It encouraged learners of all ages to reflect upon what kind of books they enjoy and why. Older learners improved their ability to appreciate and evaluate texts critically to support their comprehension and to justify their views. Learners played an important role in choosing the theme for the book award and determining the outcome, which was highly motivating for them. The initiative was successful in increasing learners' understanding of diversity issues and celebrating inclusion through high-quality picture books.

'We have had some fascinating discussions about diversity and inclusion and the children have shown that they understand the need for fair representation of all members of society in children's books'

Teacher, Cogan Primary School



Examples of effective practice in supporting learners and their families

Case study 1

Context

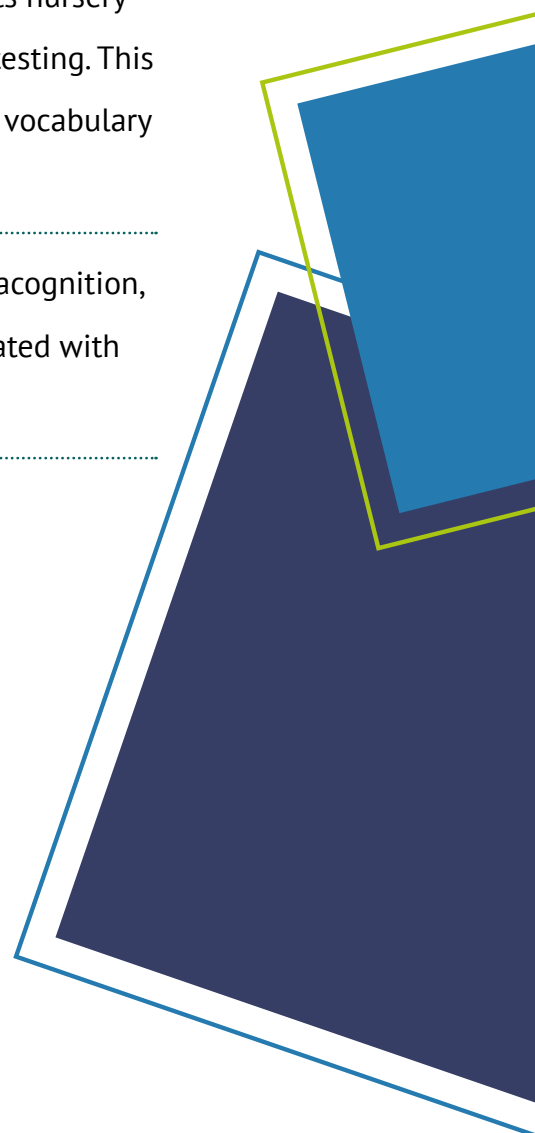
Making effective use of a language screening tool to set appropriate targets and design bespoke learning plans to meet the individual needs of learners

What do practitioners do?

Staff use the outcomes from whole-class language screening for its nursery children to identify those who would benefit from more in-depth testing. This enables staff to identify precisely the aspects of language, such as vocabulary or grammatical development that learners need to improve.

It also helps them to identify if learners have difficulties with metacognition, executive function, working memory and non-verbal ability associated with language development.

Following a thorough analysis of learners' outcomes, staff set highly specific targets for individuals who need intensive support. Each learner receives a bespoke learning plan and staff follow the prescriptive resource tool for teaching which has been developed by health professionals in Carmarthenshire NHS Trust. They use the resource to plan activities which link well to curriculum themes.



The school continues to use the whole-class screening tool and tracker for learners in the reception class. Teachers use the tracker every half-term to review the progress of all learners in the nursery and reception classes.

What is the impact?

Use of the screening tool and half-termly reviews help teachers to monitor closely all learners' progress against each aspect of language in their early years in school.

Importantly, it helps staff to identify any children who did not lag in language development previously but whose progress might have slowed.

The assessment tool, and teaching resource that accompanies it, help teachers to judge effectively when to begin teaching phonics and high-frequency words to individual learners.



Case study 2

Context

Using 'person centred profiles' to value and support individual learners' language development

What do practitioners do?

All learners in a primary school have 'person centred profiles' that are accessible to all practitioners. In the nursery and reception classes, these profiles detail the most effective method of communication for every child, with statements such as 'I speak in Polish', 'I use Makaton signs' and 'I speak slowly so please give me time'. New or temporary staff to the school read these profiles before meeting learners for the first time.



What is the impact?

These profiles help to reduce the risk of frustration or misunderstanding for learners as they develop their communication skills.

The approach encourages adults and children to value different forms of communication and different languages. This is important for learners whose home language is different to that of their teachers, or for learners who experience speech and language or hearing difficulties.



Case study 3

Context

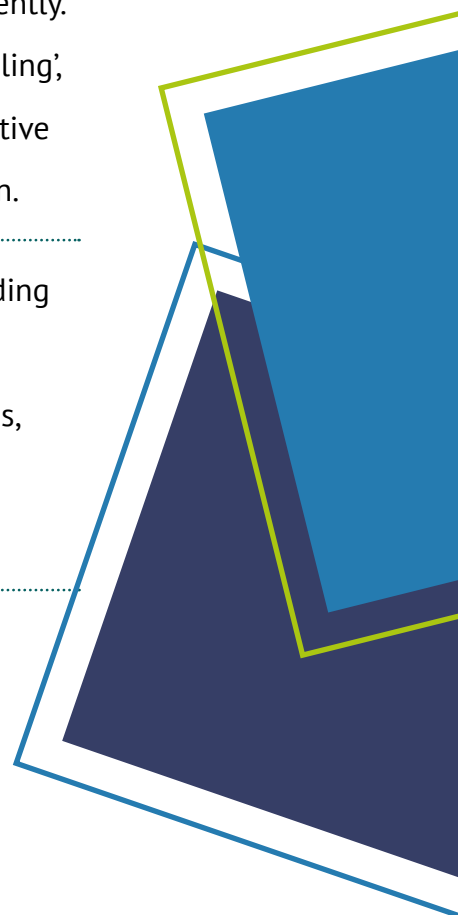
Pre-teaching essential knowledge to learners to support their progress in language and literacy

What do practitioners do?

Teachers in key stage 2 identify what learners already know and what might cause problems before they teach particular language skills. They use a 'pre-teaching' approach to support groups of learners identified as having underdeveloped language skills. They teach essential knowledge to these learners in a twenty-minute session before the class' literacy lesson.

A Year 4 teacher identifies vocabulary in the class novel that is too challenging for this group of learners to read and understand independently. He identifies words from the text, such as 'scornfully', 'devoted' and 'rambling', that are important for learners' understanding of characters in the narrative and the focus of their independent activities in their class literacy lesson.

To begin, the teacher rehearses learners' prior knowledge about the reading strategies they can use to help them to gain meaning from an unknown text. The teacher uses interactive approaches, such as games and quizzes, to explore the meaning of the identified words and gives learners an opportunity to use them in context.



What is the impact?

Learners value the extra small group time and this motivates them to work hard in the literacy lesson.

They draw on their knowledge of the reading strategies that they have rehearsed to answer questions about the text. This experience raises their confidence so that they offer worthwhile contributions more frequently and receive positive feedback from the teacher that leads to further participation.

They apply their vocabulary knowledge successfully to infer and deduce characters' motives, and subsequently respond enthusiastically to their written task.

Case study 4

Context

Helping vulnerable learners to develop their reading skills and support their wellbeing effectively

What do practitioners do?

Every week, Cariad ‘the reading dog’ visits the school with her owners to help vulnerable learners to develop their reading skills. Teachers identify learners who would also benefit from support for their emotional wellbeing.



Cariad and her owners help learners to read books about issues or experiences that relate to their personal circumstances, for example by reading ‘The Invisible String’ with learners whose parents are in the armed forces, or books such as ‘When I’m Feeling Angry’ to support learners who find it hard to control their emotions.

By ‘speaking’ to learners through her owners, Cariad the dog helps them develop strategies to support their reading. For example, they discuss how to find ways of trying to read new words or ways of remembering tricky words.

What is the impact?

Reading to a dog helps vulnerable learners to relax into reading in a supportive and calm environment. This helps to increase their self-esteem and reading confidence. Reading about how characters in stories deal with circumstances like their own helps to support learners’ wellbeing successfully.

Case study 5

Context

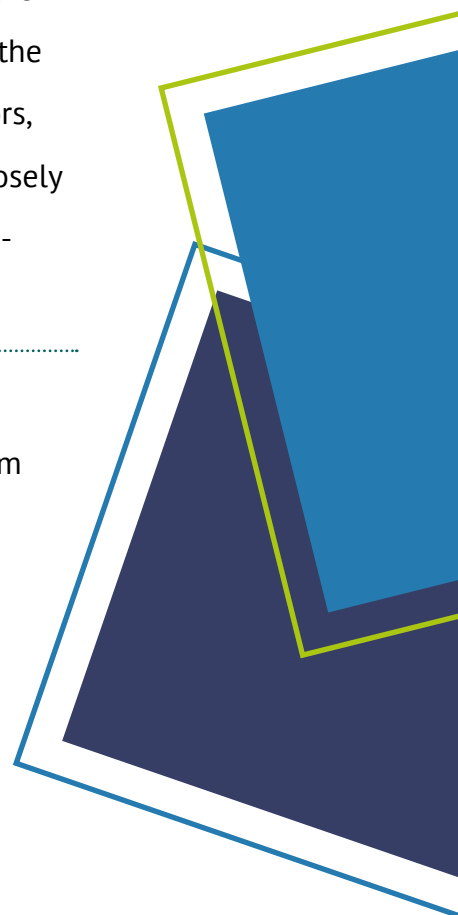
Supporting schools' early language intervention for children starting funded nursery provision

What does the local authority do to support learners and their families?

Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority takes a cross-directorate approach to early language intervention for children identified as experiencing language delay and supports their transition into non-maintained settings and school-based nursery provision.

The local authority's Community and Wellbeing and Resilience Service provides early language and communication support for parents of children from birth to four years as part of the Resilient Families Service. Within the service, speech and language therapists, parenting workers, health visitors, 'talk and play' support workers and other multi-agency partners work closely together to provide one-to-one support for families and to facilitate pre-school language programmes in the community.

Support workers carry out a speech and communication screening assessment in the home for all children once they reach 21 months. From this assessment, the Early Language and Communication Team arranges bespoke packages of support for individual families and monitors children's progress closely. They share this information with staff in the



education directorate and the receiving setting or school, so the child and family can continue to receive appropriate support.

Over a six-week period, the ‘talk and play’ workers provide weekly sessions for parents, with a different theme each week.

For example, these focus on language development through daily routines or when ‘out and about’. Every week, parents take part in a creative activity with their children and a support worker models for parents how to use the activity to talk with their child.



Each session finishes with songs, rhymes and story time. The support worker reads a story, while the parent and child follow the story with their own copy of the book.



What is the impact?

The local authority’s approach to early language intervention means that any child and family can access additional services, if there is a need identified as part of a family assessment, not just those living in Flying Start postcode areas.

The approach helps to identify children who are not making expected progress from across the local authority, and to provide them and their families with continuity of support from the early years into funded education.

Case study 6

Context

Working with others to support parents to provide the environment that children need, from birth to school, for their language development to thrive

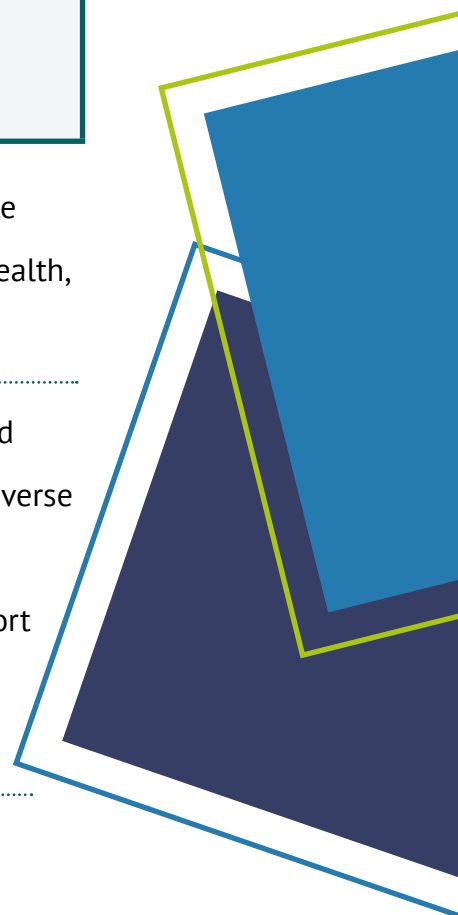
What do practitioners do?

Woodlands Community Primary School has excellent partnerships with Torfaen local authority's 'Early Language Team', health visitors and the Flying Start provision.

The school holds many parenting classes for children of all ages and promotes these actively in the wider community. For instance, it offers support to parents through a variety of early language groups for babies and toddlers.

The school holds a multi-agency panel meeting each term to co-ordinate support for individual children and families, which professionals from health, social services and education identify as causing concern.

These meetings provide valuable information on vulnerable families and children's social, emotional and learning needs, such as incidences of adverse childhood experiences, prior to children starting school. This helps the school to build up a detailed picture of specific children and what support they will continue to require as they transfer from childcare and pre-school settings to the school environment.



What is the impact?

The school recognises the important association between children's language development and their health and success throughout life.

Their collaborative and proactive approach to working with services that parents and children meet during their preschool years helps to strengthen support for parents.

This multi-agency approach helps to ensure extra intensive and specialist support for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged learners.

Through working closely with the school, parents develop their understanding of how they can support their children's language skills and why this is so important for their educational outcomes and life chances.



Case study 7

Context

Engaging successfully with families to support learners' language skills

What do practitioners do?

Tremorfa Nursery School employs a community support officer who works helpfully with different groups of parents each morning, so that it can tailor its support to families. Every week the school hosts a 'drop in' session led by health visitors to support families whose children have special educational needs.

The school runs a six-week programme for all parents and children prior to the children starting school. This provides parents with valuable guidance on play activities that they can do to support their children's language development. It also helps the parents and children become familiar with the nursery setting and its staff.

Each half term the school holds a 'stay and play' session where parents spend a morning or afternoon in the nursery and take part in language-based activities with their children. One of the 'stay and play' sessions is for 'lads, dads and grandads'. The school provides a follow up workshop for dads about 'forest schools' and how this approach to learning supports children to develop their skills, including language and literacy. The community support worker runs sessions that focus on helping dads to see how important it is for their children to see them reading. The sessions



focus well on reading purposeful print regularly, for example signs in the environment and instructions for making something practical.

The school supports well the learning of parents who have weak language skills. Leaders invite external agencies to visit the nursery to upskill parents through providing a range of courses, for example in child development, 'do-it-yourself' home improvements and cookery.

The school also provides accredited level 1 childcare courses and has a group of parents, most of whom disengaged from school before sitting external examinations, working on a level 2 course for supporting teaching assistants in the classroom. Libraries in the foyer for both adults and children help to promote a culture of reading for all. The adult library has novels that parents can borrow for enjoyment, as well as books to help with parenting.

What is the impact?

Family engagement is a strength of the school. Many parents attend the family sessions with the community support officer. Attending the parents' groups helps hard-to-reach parents develop confidence in social situations. Many who attend are parents that would not join or belong to other groups. They feel that the school is a secure place for them. They view the adult library positively and not just as a resource for parents who are finding aspects of child rearing difficult.

The adult learning programme has a strong impact on increasing parents' skills and confidence. Recently, one parent has enrolled in a further education institution to sit GCSE examinations and one has taken up employment in social care for the first time. The 'stay and play' workshops and reading sessions for parents have helped to convey to parents the importance of reading regularly to their children, and the value of reading role models.



Case study 8

Context

Helping parents and carers to support their children's listening, speaking and early reading skills through fun activities and monthly advice sessions

What do practitioners do?

Every foundation phase learner has a home-school book bag that learners take home on a weekly basis.

This includes a fun language activity for parents to enjoy with their children, for example a rhyme to learn, a picture book to read or a language game to play.



Every month, the school's additional learning needs' co-ordinator holds Monday advice, support and help sessions for parents, known as 'Mash'.

These informal events include information and activities on topics that parents have requested support with, as well as sessions that the school thinks are important. For example, they model correct pronunciation of sounds and share tips with parents on how to help their children distinguish between similar sounds, when playing phonics games.

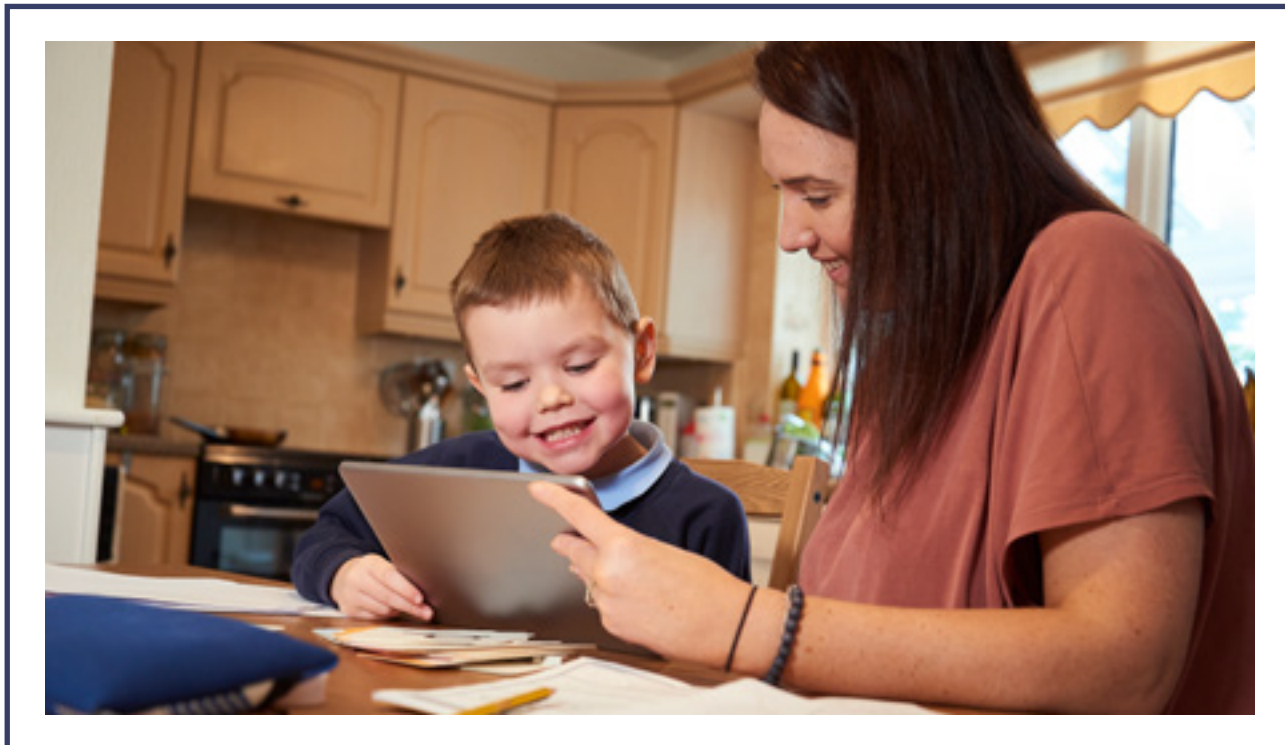
Staff make flashcards of high frequency words with the parents and show them how to access language resources and games on the Welsh Government's digital learning platform, Hwb.

What is the impact?

The school's 'low threat-high support' environment means that most parents engage well with staff to support their children's language development at home. They display positive attitudes about language learning to their children.

Many follow the school's advice about the importance of reading with their children and regular verbal interaction to develop their children's spoken language.

Parents' positive attitudes to learning about the approaches that the school uses to teach essential skills means that learners practise and consolidate these at home beneficially, for example blending phonemes to read simple words.





Professional learning support



Thinking about your own practice in planning for learning

You can read about research and evidence that supports this chapter on the learning environment and planning for learning on pages 210 to 212.

A Curriculum for Wales

In the Languages, Literacy and Communication area of learning and experience, Welsh Government sets out key considerations for schools when designing provision for skills development in all the languages they will offer their learners (Welsh Government, 2020b, pp.159-160).

These considerations include:

Provision and experiences

- How will you provide opportunities for learners to participate in planned speaking in various contexts with a wide range of peers and adults, as well as spontaneous speaking?
- How will you provide learners with a wide range of literature, including multimodal and challenging texts in paper, digital, electronic and live form, fostering their enjoyment of purposeful reading and viewing and encouraging them to explore books and new technologies?

Language development

- How will you ensure rich language environments for all learners as a model for improving their own language skills?
- How will you support reading for all learners?

- How will you provide the systematic development of phonological awareness and phonemic awareness?
- What relevant, engaging, authentic and challenging stimuli can you provide to inspire and aide preparation for purposeful speaking and writing (indoors, outdoors, through visits etc.)?
- How will you provide opportunities for learners to make progress in learning to talk and learning through talk?
- How will you ensure that knowledge and skills in one language are transferred to and developed in other languages?

Considerations when selecting literature

Schools should:

- create a positive reading culture which immerses learners in literature that reflects their interests and ignites their enthusiasm
- choose literature which is sufficiently rich and substantial to engage learners intellectually and emotionally and which can encourage them to be inspired, moved and changed
- ensure that learners experience a range of contemporary literature and literature from periods in the past

Learners should:

- experience a wealth of literature which provides opportunities to realise the four purposes of the curriculum
- be exposed to a diverse range of literary experiences beyond the classroom
- be introduced to literature which reflects diversity and cultures in the locality, Wales and the wider world

- have the opportunity to experience and to learn about literature and the creators of literature which have made a significant contribution, be that in Wales, other nations in the UK, and/or the wider world

Your practice

After reading this chapter of the report, you may wish to reflect on your current practice in developing learners' language and literacy skills. Consider the questions from the *Curriculum for Wales* guidance (Welsh Government, 2020b) and the questions below. These questions might help to inform your thinking as you design your curriculum for this area of learning and experience:

- What are the strengths in language and literacy teaching and learning experiences in your class and in your school?
- Which areas are not as strong? What are the reasons for this?

Now think about how you will build on the current strengths for developing learners' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills:

- What needs to be improved?
- What needs to change in light of the Welsh Government's guidance?
- What is new?
- How might you address the areas which are not strong enough, when you design your Languages, Literacy and Communication curriculum?

Thinking about your own practice in developing learners' writing

You can read more about research and evidence that supports this chapter on teaching and assessment, and the development of learners' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, on pages 213 to 222.

Research suggests that the links between listening, speaking and writing vary according to a child's developmental phase. It suggests that oral language may play a stronger role in supporting writing for younger learners³ and for those who struggle with writing, particularly in developing vocabulary⁴, than for most learners in key stage 2⁵. This is likely because, as children get older and their literacy skills become more developed, their writing draws on a range of different grammatical and structural features that are not, generally, used when speaking⁶. In addition, research evidence indicates that the influence of speaking on writing is, in part, brought about by learners' reading fluency and comprehension. Most studies find a particularly strong relationship between reading and writing development⁷

The resources that schools in Wales use most often to support their planning for developing learners' writing, have the following common characteristics:

- They provide a systematic and structured approach to teaching aspects of writing

³ Donaldson and Cooper, 2013; Perera, 1984

⁴ Dunsmuir and Blatchford, 2004

⁵ Dockrell, Marshall and Wyse, 2015

⁶ Dockrell, Marshall and Wyse, 2015, p.10

⁷ Abbott, Berninger and Fayol, 2010; McCarthy, Hogan and Catts, 2012

- The resources, activities, approaches and strategies are designed to be used across classes in a ‘whole school’ approach
- They are based on the principle that learners learn to write better through talk and the oral rehearsal of ideas before writing
- There is emphasis on planning for writing and structuring writing
- Scaffolding supports the language learning process, and this includes the gradual release of responsibility from teacher to learner
- They aim to extend learners’ knowledge and use of vocabulary, sentence structure and punctuation
- They encourage daily writing practice
- They aim to improve learners’ ability to write creatively and at length

Your practice

You might wish to consider the following questions as a staff team.

They might help you to:

- reflect on why you use the resources you do
 - consider whether they support your planning and teaching to develop learners’ writing well enough
 - think about how you use research and evidence to inform your professional choices
-

1. How do you achieve shared, consistent and suitably high expectations for developing learners’ writing?

2. Should all teachers use the same resources, with common approaches and strategies, to develop learners' writing skills?

- What are the reasons for doing this?
- Are there benefits to adopting bespoke approaches for specific age phases or groups of learners?
- Do some approaches and strategies lend themselves better to a particular stage of language learning?
- How do you ensure you meet learners' developmental needs as they progress through the school?
- How do you ensure consistency in the quality of teaching for writing?

3. How well do the resources and approaches help you to plan sufficient challenge for more able learners to progress their writing skills to a high standard?

- Do they support older and more able pupils in key stage 2 to experiment with *combinations* of text types and styles to suit different purposes?
- Do they help to develop confident and mature writers who can use the characteristics of different forms *and* manipulate the rules?
- How do you ensure scaffolding does not constrain learners' writing?

4. Research shows children apply the knowledge base used in reading to their writing across all levels of language (Abbott, Berninger and Fayol, 2010). Given this, do the resources and approaches you use to plan and teach writing link closely enough to learners' reading, particularly in key stage 2?

Thinking about your own practice in developing learners' vocabulary

Research evidence shows that vocabulary is a critical factor in the development of learners' reading skills. As learners decode words, they use their knowledge of words to understand what they read. If the words they come across are not part of their vocabulary, they will not be able to understand their meaning (Kamil, 2004). The order of word learning is not developmental. This depends on learners' environments and experiences.

Many words in the English language are 'homographs' – they are spelled the same, are usually pronounced the same, but have different meanings. A word can also have multiple senses, for example common words such as *like*, *run*, *give* and *light*, where we use the word in different ways depending on the context. In these instances, the words have a core meaning which comes from their origin.

Many children will learn the different meanings and senses of these everyday words in context early on in their language acquisition. This is because they come across them frequently in conversations with adults. However, not all children will have experienced the use of the words in context to support them to build this knowledge before they join a nursery setting or start school.

As learners advance in their language development, they will meet words of varying complexity, with multiple meanings and 'senses' when reading, as well as through listening. Teaching words which appear in written texts, but rarely in conversations, can have a powerful effect on learners' literacy (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013). Commonly, teachers ask learners to use a dictionary to find the definition of a word they do not know. Research studies

(McKeown, 1991; Scott and Nagy, 1989) have shown that this approach can be problematic, particularly if this is the sole approach to learning the meaning of words. This is because dictionary definitions are often concise and do not provide enough information, in context, to help learners to understand the meaning of words successfully.

You can read more about why developing learners' vocabulary is important on pages 222 to 224.

Your practice

You might wish to look at the Languages, Literacy and Communication guidance in *A Curriculum for Wales* (Welsh Government, 2020b) and relate the practice we have described about developing learners' vocabulary to the following sections:

- **Statements of what matters**
- **Principles of progression**

Have a look at where vocabulary knowledge and vocabulary development feature in the **Descriptions of learning**.

Now use these questions as a starting point to help you reflect upon your own practice and provision for developing learners' vocabulary:

- Which words or kinds of words are important to teach?
- How do you make the hidden process of vocabulary development visible to your learners?

Planning

- Do you plan for the explicit teaching of vocabulary to your learners, as well as taking opportunities to develop word learning through natural situations as they arise?
- How do you identify the new words you want learners to learn? How do you choose these words? Depending upon learners' levels of language and literacy, do you identify:
 - everyday words which occur often in conversations?
 - words which appear in written texts but rarely in conversation?
 - words which are associated with specific topics and subjects?
- How do you plan to meet the needs of learners with limited vocabulary, particularly to support their reading for understanding?

Teaching and assessing

- Do you make decisions about how you will introduce learners to the words, for example through listening and speaking or through written text?
- Do you consider carefully if it is best to introduce learners only to the core meaning of the word or to explore different uses of the word, or 'shades' of meaning?
- Do you think about how you will explain the words in everyday language pupils understand?
- What will learners do to engage with the words and their meanings?

- Do you provide authentic contexts for learners to develop and apply their word learning skills in literacy sessions and in other curriculum areas?
- How do you involve learners in assessing their word knowledge and use?
- How do you encourage them to take ownership of their own learning of vocabulary?

Thinking about your own practice in fostering a culture of reading

You can read more about the benefits of fostering a reading culture for learners on pages 225 to 226.

Your practice

1. Thinking about what learners read

Does it matter whether learners read fiction or non-fiction?

Research suggests it does. You might like to read the following online articles to explore further the link between reading fiction for enjoyment and reading attainment:

- **Fact or fiction? Novels come top for reading skills**
(University College London, Institute of Education, 2018)
- **Are all types of reading equal, or are some more equal than others?**
(Jerrim, 2019)
- **Book Trust Cymru: Re-thinking Reading for Pleasure in the New Curriculum** (Welsh Government, 2020a)

2. Thinking about what teachers read

Evidence from our inspection work and research (for example, Cremin *et al.*, 2008) suggests that many teachers may not be sufficiently familiar with a diverse range of children's authors and poets to enable them to foster learners' reading habits as well as they could. In general, we see that many primary teachers rely on a limited canon of children's authors

and, to an even lesser extent, poets. This restricts their ability to make appropriate book recommendations, which meet learners' diverse needs and interests, and to promote independent reading for pleasure.

The Open University's **Research-Rich Pedagogies** website (The Open University, 2020) provides lots of information from the Open University and United Kingdom Literacy Association's joint research projects on reading for pleasure. This includes research and examples of practice in developing teachers' subject knowledge. For example, in a short video, Teresa Cremin (Professor of Education, The Open University), and a primary school teacher from Essex talk about practical ways to develop teachers' knowledge of children's literature and other texts.

Thinking about your own practice in developing effective support for learners and their families

You can read more about assessing and supporting learners' progress in language and literacy on pages 227 to 228.

Your practice

1. Thinking about family learning

In our report, '**Community Schools: Families and communities at the heart of school life**' (Estyn, 2020b), published in July 2020, we explore how schools strengthen family and community engagement. You might like to use the report and case studies, to think about how family learning can support the development of learners' language and literacy.

2. Thinking about learners with special educational needs

In January 2020, we published '**Pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools - A good practice report**' (Estyn, 2020d). This identifies the importance of the early identification of children's needs along with strong partnership working between settings and schools as key drivers in ensuring appropriate interventions are put in place for learners with language and literacy needs.

The report provides case studies of effective practice relevant to language and literacy.

Research and evidence



The learning environment and planning for learning

- 1 Research confirms the importance of the quality of the learning environment on children's language development. Language, conversation and gesture are important aspects of communication within that environment, particularly during a child's early years in education (Goswami, 2015, p.24). They support the development of a range of early literacy skills, as well as knowledge and understanding.
- 2 Settings and schools that prioritise approaches emphasising spoken language and verbal interaction for young children benefit all learners. Some studies show slightly greater impact from these approaches on improving the language and literacy of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a). The approaches include reading aloud to children and discussing books with them, extending children's spoken vocabulary by introducing them to new words in context, and drawing attention to letters and sounds (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018b). In addition, they include approaches aimed at developing thinking and understanding through language, such as structuring high-quality interactions between adults and children. Talking with, rather than to children, about their immediate experiences and activities, is likely to be more effective.
- 3 The home learning environment has a significant impact on young children's language acquisition and cognitive development. In a European longitudinal study of a sample of young children's development between the ages of three and seven years, Siraj-Blatchford *et al* confirmed that what parents and carers do makes a 'real difference' (2004, pp.4-5). The quality of the home learning environment has a greater impact on children's development, than parents' occupation, education or income. This is achieved through parental activities such as:
 - teaching their child songs and nursery rhymes
 - reading with their child

- teaching the alphabet and playing with letters
- visiting the library
- creating regular opportunities for them to play with their peers at home

Waiting until a child starts school means missing an important opportunity to intervene in language development (Bornstein, Hahn and Putnick, 2016; McKean *et al.*, 2015). This is because the effects of environmental influences on children's language abilities start early (Fernald, Marchman and Weisleder, 2013; Hoff, 2003).

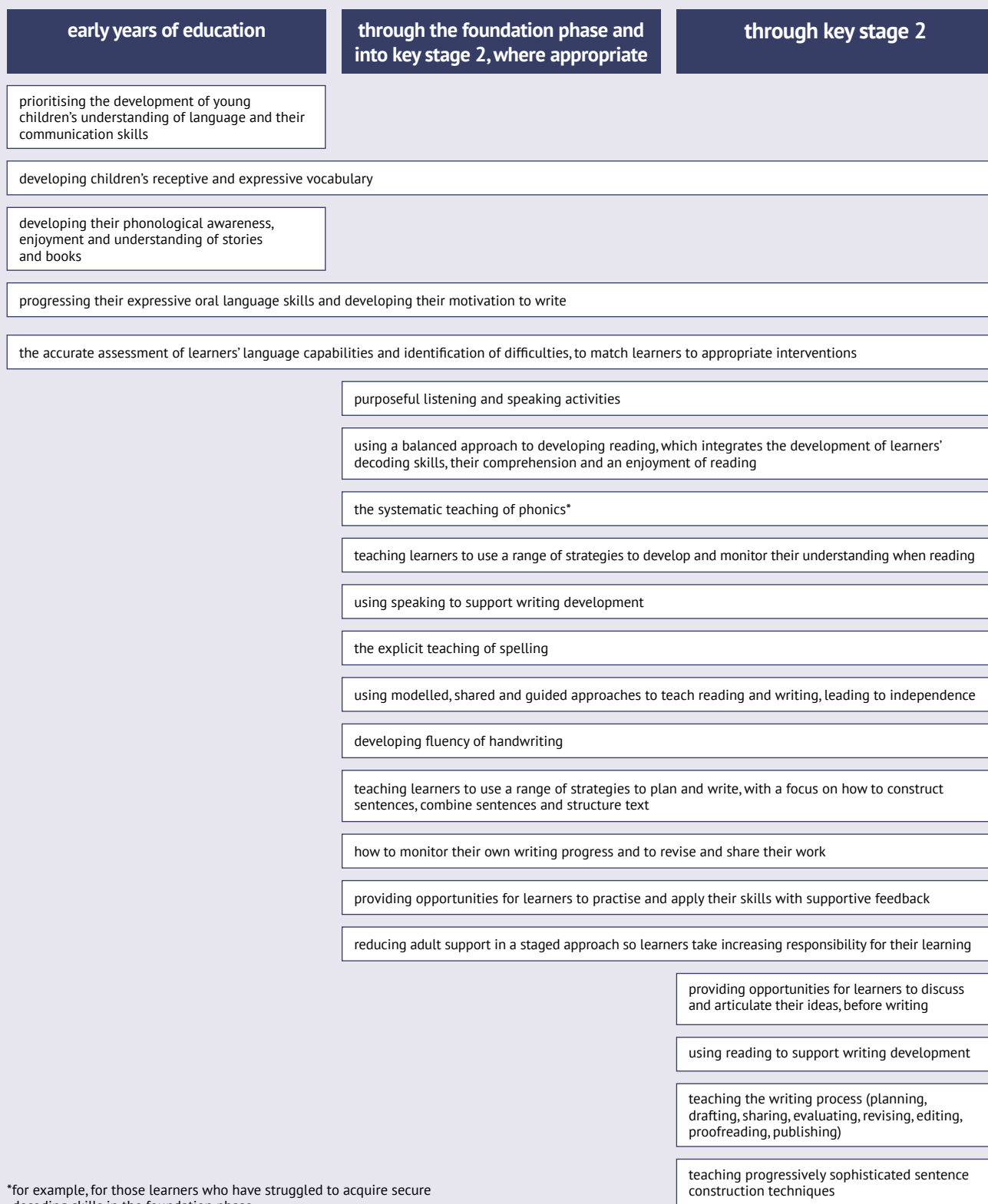
- 4 Ensuring the learning environment is 'word rich' is key to developing learners' language skills in the primary school (Fisher and Blachnowicz, 2004, p.67). Kucan (2012, p.361) describes this as a classroom environment where words are being 'noticed', 'investigated', 'celebrated' and 'savoured' constantly. This is achieved through using activities, resources and materials that help learners to play with words and to think explicitly about language.
- 5 In our 2011 review of literacy in the foundation phase, we reported on how the majority of schools had built on existing plans for the development of children's literacy skills, following the introduction of the foundation phase in Wales. We emphasised that effective schools see language learning as holistic, where listening, speaking, reading and writing support and enhance overall language development. Where schools do this best, they develop language in relation to the context in which it is used and engage children actively (Estyn, 2011).
- 6 In our 2014 report, *English in key stages 2 and 3* (Estyn, 2014), we identified that curriculum planning for language and literacy was generally good in a majority of primary schools. In the few best examples, schools planned rich and varied contexts for language and literacy development in key stage 2, providing progressively challenging work. However, the report identified weaknesses in a minority of schools' planning for the skills of reading for comprehension and writing non-literary texts. A majority did not plan work that was challenging enough to stretch more able pupils.

- 7 The four statements that express what matters in the Languages, Literacy and Communication area of learning and experience are intended to be addressed holistically (Welsh Government, 2020b). This means the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing should be developed in relation to one another, and so too should the different languages. There is notable emphasis on the development of learners' listening and speaking skills at the early progression steps in the descriptions of learning. The organisation of the statements of what matters supports the development of related competencies in each of the language skills, for example developing inference as receptive skills in listening and reading (*Understanding languages is key to understanding the world around us*), or developing the ability to speak and write for different audiences as expressive skills (*Expressing ourselves through languages is key to communication*). Vocabulary development is identified within the descriptions of learning for listening, reading, speaking and writing.

Teaching and assessment

- 8 The *Curriculum for Wales* guidance emphasises the need for practitioners to give consideration to pedagogies that are specific to the Languages, Literacy and Communication area of learning and experience (Welsh Government, 2020b, p.160). Importantly, it reminds schools that assessment ‘should always focus on moving learning forward by understanding the learning which has already taken place’ and by ‘using this to ensure that each learner is challenged and supported appropriately, according to their individual learning needs’ (Welsh Government, 2020b, p.9).
- 9 The Education Endowment Foundation (2017b, 2018a) presents a series of reports on the theme of language and literacy teaching and assessment, which draw on evidence of approaches, that, when used effectively, can make a difference to learners’ language learning, for example the use of high-quality information about learners’ current capabilities to select the best next steps for teaching.

10 Research and evidence from our inspections and thematic work show that effective provision for language and literacy is characterised by:



*for example, for those learners who have struggled to acquire secure decoding skills in the foundation phase

- 11 The 'gradual release of responsibility' model developed by Pearson and Gallagher (1983) influences the approach that many schools use to teach reading and writing. This approach requires the teacher to take responsibility for the writing or reading, for example through modelling explicitly how to create or read a text, to a situation in which the learners assume all of the responsibility (Duke and Pearson, 2002). Teachers plan opportunities for learners to practise the taught skills through shared and guided reading and writing activities, to give them the skills and confidence to take their learning forward independently.
- 12 In 2008, in our publication, *Best practice in the reading and writing of pupils aged 7 to 14 years* (Estyn, 2008, p.16) we highlighted that the term 'texts' also includes a range of media that challenges the assumption that reading and writing is concerned only with printed text. *A Curriculum for Wales* (Welsh Government, 2020b) emphasises the importance of learners experiencing and reading a wide range of multimodal texts to support their language learning. The inclusion and extent of images that appear in multimodal texts are increasing, and our society, in general, is moving from a print-based to a multimodal society (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). Currently, teaching learners how to 'read' still and moving images on their own, or in combination with print, sound or movement, and to communicate using different sorts of media, is at an early stage of development in many primary schools in Wales.

Developing learners' listening and speaking skills

- 13 Oral language is key to a child's cognitive development and learning. It precedes and underpins reading and writing (Law *et al.*, 2017), and provides a foundation for learning and thinking. Approaches that emphasise spoken language and verbal interaction support the effective development of communication, language and literacy.

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- 14 Typically, word learning is split into two distinct components: receptive vocabulary (what children understand) and expressive vocabulary (what children say). From around two years of age, using a diverse vocabulary and including rare or infrequent words become more important for children to develop a more advanced vocabulary. From around three years of age, exposing children to the language of recount, story, description and pretend play, using past and future tenses, is important for building their receptive vocabularies (Rowe, 2012).
- 15 In general, early language development progresses through a series of distinct but overlapping stages with most children following similar patterns, although the speed at which language develops can vary considerably (Law *et al.*, 2017). By three years of age, there are notable differences between the number of words that a child uses and how they put words together. Some children start well and drop behind; others start very slowly and catch up. Research suggests how well a child puts words together is likely to give a better indication of later language ability than the number of words a child uses (Law *et al.*, 2017). Effective monitoring of children's progress at different stages of oral language acquisition is necessary to catch quickly those children falling behind, whatever their stage of development.
- 16 While variability in children's language acquisition is, in part, likely due to genetics (Stromswold, 2001), environmental factors play a vital role too (Hoff, 2006). Evidence indicates that the rate at which children acquire language is sensitive to the amount of input they receive from adults around them. We have known for a long time that children whose parents talk to them a lot have quicker vocabulary development (Hart and Risley, 1995; Cartmill *et al.*, 2013). However, the *quality* of the language and talk that children experience also matters and is likely to be at least as important as how much exposure to language they receive (Rowe, 2012).

- 17** *A Curriculum for Wales* (Welsh Government, 2020b) places greater focus on the development of learners' listening skills than previous national curricula in Wales, to help learners to become 'unbiased and critically-aware interpreters of what they hear' (Welsh Government, 2020b, p.127). This includes supporting learners to become more conscious and self-aware of how others communicate through speech, gesture or other media and, in turn, to interpret, evaluate and articulate their own responses appropriately.
- 18** The purposeful teaching of listening and speaking throughout a child's early years and primary education cannot be emphasised enough. Learners need to learn to listen and to talk; and they need to learn through talk, if they are to become confident and successful learners, critical thinkers, effective communicators and active citizens.

Developing learners' reading skills

- 19** Across languages, children's phonological awareness is an important contributing factor to their reading and spelling development (Ziegler and Goswami, 2005). Phonological awareness is the ability to distinguish features of speech, such as syllables, onset-rime and phonemes. It is important that children develop phonological awareness of rhyme, syllables and stress patterns in words, as this is related to their later ability to read fluently (Harper, 2011; Law *et al.*, 2017). This is because awareness of syllables and rhymes develops prior to literacy across languages, whereas phonemic awareness does not. Phonemic awareness is dependent entirely on teaching because the phoneme is not a natural unit of speech.
- 20** Recent advances in research show how individual differences between children in phonological awareness, or speech-sound awareness, can predict reading and spelling development across languages. Work with young children has revealed that sensory cues, such as music and poetry, help them to develop their awareness of rhyme, syllables and stress patterns in words. Drumming to different beat structures in music, clapping out the syllable structure of poems and marching to the beat patterns in nursery rhymes

all enhance language processing and help struggling readers (Goswami, 2018). When starting school, a child with poor phonological awareness will have more difficulty in learning to read. Learners with poor phonological skills and reduced sensitivity to rhythm are at risk of dyslexia in all languages (Goswami, 2015).

- 21** The *Curriculum for Wales* guidance, reminds settings and schools of the importance of having in place, a clear procedure for, and placing emphasis on, ‘the systematic development of learners’ phonological and phonemic awareness’ (Welsh Government, 2020b, p.161):

When appropriate for a learner, the teaching of phonics should be systematic and consistent, and take place with other language activities, which promote vocabulary-building and comprehension.

Phonics teaching or instruction is a set of approaches or methods for the initial teaching of reading and writing, which focus on the relationship between letters and sounds. To avoid confusion and misconceptions, it is important to distinguish between the knowledge and skills learners acquire (i.e. phonological and phonemic awareness) and the teaching methods which lead to this.

- 22** Learners’ early reading skills of understanding and response should develop in parallel with their decoding skills. For example, early readers should show their understanding of texts read to them and those they read themselves. They should express their response to poems, stories and non-literary texts by identifying aspects they like. They may ‘infer’ meaning from texts even at this early stage of reading development (National Foundation for Educational Research, 2008).
- 23** Research identifies that, as learners become more fluent in their reading, they should be taught to use an increasing range of strategies to develop their comprehension, when reading independently. Reading comprehension strategies focus on the learners’ understanding of written text. Therefore, it is important to teach learners that there are different kinds of reading that are appropriate for different purposes and this influences

the strategies we use (Estyn, 2008). This means that practitioners should teach learners a range of techniques, which enable them to comprehend the meaning of what they read (See appendix 3).

- 24** Comprehension activities require learners to use ideas and information in the passage, and intuition and personal experience, as the basis for making conjectures or hypotheses. In other words, working out what the author is trying to tell them using clues and evidence from the text, when it is not written explicitly – ‘to read between and beyond the lines’. Almost any reading activity that goes beyond literal understanding involves some degree of inference. Inference can be as simple as associating the pronoun ‘he’ with a previously mentioned male person; or, it can be as complex as understanding a subtle, implicit message, conveyed through the choice of particular vocabulary by the writer and drawing on the reader’s own background knowledge (National Foundation for Educational Research, 2008). In addition to inferring, learners may need to use their evaluation skills to form an opinion or make a judgement based either on the passage alone and/or on their prior knowledge and experience.
- 25** Often, schools and organisations use the term, ‘higher order reading skills’ to consider progression in the development of learners’ reading skills in key stage 2. Commonly, they use this to refer to skills, such as ‘inference and deduction’ when reading a fiction text or ‘skimming and scanning’ for information, when researching a topic to support their work across the curriculum. The term ‘higher order’ can be misleading. For example, we know young learners, who are not yet secure in their decoding skills, can infer and deduce meaning from texts when read by an adult. In addition, younger learners can locate appropriate sources and retrieve information from texts, when the texts are accessible. In *Guidance on the teaching of higher-order reading skills* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010, p.4), it states:

What we traditionally call higher-order reading skills (i.e. the skills of location, reorganisation, inference, evaluation and appreciation) should be taught to learners right from the start of their reading journey.

Developing learners' writing skills

- 26** The act of writing involves multiple processes, strategies and conventions that work together to create a text for a particular purpose and audience. The new *Curriculum for Wales* guidance (Welsh Government, 2020b) provides prompts for schools to consider when designing their language provision. They include learners responding to and creating their own texts in different media using a wide range of formats, for example using print and image (still or moving) or print, image, sound and movement.
- 27** Commonly, the teaching of writing in primary schools is characterised by a series of steps or stages designed to enable learners to write texts for different purposes and audiences independently, or with limited support from adults. Usually, this begins with the teacher exemplifying the text type and demonstrating how to write in a specific format for a particular purpose and audience. Research shows the explicit teaching of text features can improve learners' writing (for example, Englert *et al.*, 1991). Often learners take part in subsequent collaborative activities to practise the process of writing with guidance and support, before taking responsibility for writing the text form individually.
- 28** Many primary schools use a 'deductive' or problem-solving approach to teaching writing. This involves learners analysing the structure, organisation and language features of different forms of text, in the context of the specific purpose and audience for the writing. In this approach, learners construct their own 'rules' or 'success criteria' for the writing of different forms of text, which they can modify and extend in light of further experience. During and after writing, learners are encouraged to evaluate the effectiveness of their writing.
- 29** Reading and writing are related closely: they share many similar cognitive processes and knowledge about print are essential for both (Fitzgerald and Shanahan, 2000). For example, children need to learn that print has meaning; that in English, text is read from left to right and from top to bottom; and that print can have different purposes.

Expressive language skills underpin young children's writing skills, which is why storytelling, role play and reading aloud are such important language activities. At the earliest developmental stages of writing, research and the Welsh Government (2015b, p.23), stress the importance of adults providing opportunities for children to make marks and draw symbols freely, that are recognised and valued *as writing*. This is also the case for nursery-aged children experimenting with a range of mark-making instruments and materials across a range of contexts.

- 30** Overall, the relationship between oral language activities and the writing development of learners of primary-school age is relatively unexplored in research literature. Research shows that the oral rehearsal of ideas supports the writing of young writers (Adams *et al.*, 2013), helping them to think about exactly how they will express their ideas before writing. The need to focus on the transcription skills of letter formation, spelling, sentence construction and content can often be daunting for young or struggling writers. In addition, there is evidence that when key stage 2 learners 'play' with well-known texts, for instance by substituting words and adapting the narrative, it can help them to write creatively (Boscolo, Gelati and Galvan, 2012).
- 31** Most teachers use scaffolding as a teaching approach to support learners during the writing process (Wood, Bruner and Ross; 1976; Wood, 1998). Typically, this involves dividing a writing activity, for example creating an explanation text, into smaller, progressively complex tasks to support the learner. It could also involve shifting gradually the responsibility for the writing over a few days, or a week or two, from the teacher to the learner. A review of research evidence suggests a scaffolded approach to the teaching of writing can help to motivate learners to write, and improve the quality of what they produce, particularly alongside helpful formative feedback (Andrews *et al.*, 2009). For example, scaffolding can support learners to write in complex forms, such as discussion texts, where they learn incrementally to construct the two sides of an argument. However, scaffolding does not guarantee a learner will improve their writing skills. This has to be matched carefully to the ability of the individual learner

(Donovan and Smolkin, 2002). This reinforces why high-quality formative assessment of learners' individual strengths and weaknesses in writing is so crucial for teachers to match successfully writing tasks and levels of support to learners' abilities (Graham and Sandmel, 2011).

- 32 When managed carefully, collaborative writing, where learners work together to plan, draft, revise and edit their work (Graham and Perin, 2007), and paired writing (Yarrow and Topping, 2001) are approaches that can support learners' writing development successfully. In addition, paired writing, where learners work with a peer or an adult, for example a volunteer, can have a positive effect on learners' self-esteem and their perceptions of themselves as 'writers' (Yarrow and Topping, 2001).
- 33 There is strong evidence from studies that the direct teaching of spelling, vocabulary, sentence construction, punctuation and grammar improves learners' writing. In addition, providing learners with daily opportunities to write is effective in supporting the development of these core skills (Graham and Perin, 2007). When these skills become increasingly automatic, learners can concentrate on the content and style of what they write (McCutchen, 2000).

Developing learners' vocabulary

- 34 Words are part of meaning-making experiences from very early in a child's development. Vocabulary development is exponential in early childhood, with new word learning being rapid at age two where children acquire around ten new words daily (Goswami, 2015, p.12). Research suggests that although many children acquire vocabulary naturally through activities at home and at school, this cannot be left to chance – particularly in the case of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 35 Language development shows marked variation in early childhood, where the quality and quantity of talk to young children is developmentally important. Speaking and building vocabulary, along with listening and understanding words, are the vital

foundations that enable children to learn to read (Save the Children, 2015). Research studies show that vocabulary development and vocabulary knowledge are critical to supporting academic success because they are highly predictive of future reading comprehension ability (Christ and Wang, 2011). Having a low vocabulary can trap children in a vicious circle, since pupils who cannot read more advanced texts miss out on opportunities to extend their vocabulary (Fisher and Blachnowicz, 2005). They are also less successful in using strategies for word learning (Blachnowicz and Fisher, 2000).

- 36** Less vocabulary knowledge means pupils are more likely to experience difficulty with reading comprehension and in their learning in other curriculum subjects (Hart and Risley, 1995; Chall, Jacobs and Baldwin, 1990; Biemiller, 2001). Evidence shows that, alongside socio-economic status, vocabulary is one of the most significant factors in pupils achieving a grade A*–C at GCSE in mathematics, English language and English literature (Spencer *et al.*, 2017). Improving learners' vocabulary raises attainment in literacy and performance across subject areas. This also influences learners' subject choices at higher levels of study, their future employment prospects and their life chances.
- 37** Between 1986 and 2008, there were 31 studies that focused on approaches to developing children's vocabulary in the classroom (Christ and Wang, 2011). This research was carried out in linguistics, psychology, child development and education. A review of these studies found practitioners used three main methods to develop children's vocabulary knowledge:
- exposing children to advanced words in different contexts
 - providing direct teaching of word meanings
 - using a range of methods to support children with less than average vocabulary knowledge

Overall, the following approaches, had the most positive impact on developing learners' vocabulary:

- a 'theme-based' approach to teaching vocabulary, such as learning related words
- using a variety of methods to teach vocabulary knowledge
- exposing learners to each word and its meaning(s) on multiple occasions
- using teaching approaches that help learners to gain a deeper understanding of a word
- integrating word learning across the curriculum and across the school day
- assessing learners' vocabulary knowledge to inform future teaching

Fostering a culture of reading

- 38** Research recognises clearly the potential benefits of fostering a reading culture and the importance of learners' attitudes to reading. When there is a successful reading culture in a school, learners are immersed in their reading: they read for pleasure; to satisfy their curiosity; and to discover information and stories that help them learn and achieve. They are motivated to read and learn more – which makes reading easier and more enjoyable. This encourages learners to read further and, over time, to choose literature that is increasingly challenging. This creates a 'virtuous circle' of constant improvement in reading and learning.
- 39** Many schools cite reading for pleasure and the consequent development of positive reading habits for life as an educational goal. In 2006, the National Literacy Trust highlighted the benefits of learners reading for pleasure to be improvements to reading attainment and writing ability, text comprehension and grammar, breadth of vocabulary, attitudes to reading and self-confidence as a reader (Clark and Rumbold, 2006, p.9).
- 40** Studies have found a significant link between reading for enjoyment and educational achievement. There is evidence that reading for enjoyment has a greater impact on a child's educational success than the family's socio-economic status. It could also be an important way to help combat social exclusion and raise educational standards (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2002). In addition to raising attainment, research proves that literacy contributes significantly to happiness and success in adult life (Clark and Rumbold, 2006).
- 41** The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) identifies and comments on learners' attitudes to reading in the most recent Programme of International Student Assessment, reporting that, on average, learners in Wales are more confident in their reading ability than the average learner is across the OECD, but are less likely to read a book; they are more likely to read online than to read a novel.

Learners in Wales displayed more negative attitudes to learning than their peers across other OECD countries did. The majority claimed they read only for information, as was the case when reading was last the focus in the 2009 tests (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019a).

- 42 A *Curriculum for Wales* (Welsh Government, 2020b) emphasises the key role reading for pleasure has to play in supporting learners' mental health and emotional wellbeing, as well as developing their literacy skills and supporting their learning overall. It emphasises the importance of teaching and learning in promoting learners' interest in reading 'for enjoyment, for imaginative purposes and for learning' (Welsh Government, 2020b, p.161).
- 43 In 2008, in our publication, *Best practice in the reading and writing of pupils aged 7 to 14 years* (Estyn, 2008, p.17), we emphasised encouraging learners to read widely for pleasure and to develop reading habits essential for life, as cornerstones of effective curriculum provision in key stages 2 and 3.

Effective support for learners and their families

- 44** Evidence suggests that the accurate early identification of children in need of additional support cannot be a single event. This is because of the variability that exists in children's language development before they start school. Many language difficulties can emerge, and also be resolved during this time. The continuous monitoring and assessing of a child's progress towards developmental milestones has several advantages. Firstly, findings from multiple assessment tools increases notably the reliability of the assessment of a child's abilities (Bornstein, Hahn and Putnick, 2016). Secondly, this approach helps to provide a 'safety net' within which to catch children that earlier assessments might have missed, or who did not display difficulties at the time of those assessments. In addition, this approach allows settings and schools to monitor changes in learners' language skills.
- 45** There are challenges in measuring and assessing learners' development in language and communication. The milestones we expect children to reach cover a variety of language domains – understanding, use of words and sentences, speech development, and the ability to use appropriate social communication skills. These language domains change across developmental stages (Law *et al.*, 2017). For example, on the one hand, the majority of children who are 'late talkers' appear to resolve their language difficulties by the time they start school. On the other hand, many children identified as having language delay are not categorised as late talkers when toddlers (Rescorla, 2011).
- 46** Once children start school, the notable variability in language development, which we see for individual children in the early years, appears to steady (Bornstein, Hahn and Putnick, 2016; Tomblin, Zhang *et al.*, 2003). However, many children continue to move in and out of language difficulties between four and seven years of age (McKean *et al.*, 2017; Zubrick, Taylor and Christensen, 2015). Evidence from longitudinal studies suggests that there are particular risk factors that schools can look out for, such as

weaknesses in children's receptive and expressive skills, or a family history of language difficulties (Reilly, Bishop and Tomblin, 2014; Zambrana *et al.*, 2014).

- 47** Research confirms that all interventions to support learners' language learning require robust evaluation of their effectiveness. Evidence suggests that in order to close the language and literacy 'gap', leaders and staff should explore the effectiveness of approaches that target children's weaknesses in language and literacy, in parallel with those designed to support their social and emotional development.

Appendix 1: Evidence base



The findings in this survey are based on an analysis of:

- visits to non-maintained settings and primary schools that were identified, using inspection evidence, as being highly successful at developing learners' language and literacy and reducing the impact of disadvantage
- focus groups with learners
- scrutiny of inspection reports over the past four years
- interviews with local authority and regional consortia officers
- a wide range of national and international research
- evidence from Estyn best practice case studies.

We visited the following English-medium settings and schools as part of this survey:

Cogan Primary School, The Vale of Glamorgan

Cwmrhydyceirw Primary School, Swansea

Ewloe Green Community Primary School, Flintshire

Gaer Primary School, Newport

Kiddies' World Playgroup, Wrexham

Little Acorns, Powys

Little Stars Nursery, Torfaen

Mount Stuart Primary School, Cardiff

Pembrey CP School, Carmarthenshire

Tremorfa Nursery School, Cardiff

Trinant Primary School, Caerphilly

Ysgol Heulfan, Wrexham

Woodlands Community Primary School, Torfaen

Numbers, quantities and proportions:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

Appendix 2: Background information on settings and schools⁸

⁸ All contextual information (unless otherwise noted) is taken from the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC). Information about learners on roll includes learners of all ages, but eFSM, SEN, ethnicity and EAL percentages are calculated for learners of statutory school age (5-15 y.o.).

Cogan Primary School is an English-medium primary school in the Vale of Glamorgan. In January 2020 there were 206 learners on roll. The three-year rolling average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 10%, which is below the national average (19%). The school identifies 22% of its pupils as having special educational needs. This includes those in mainstream classes and in the hearing resource base. This is in line with Wales average. A very few pupils have statements of special educational needs. A few pupils come from a minority ethnic background (18%), which is above the national average of 13%. A very few of these pupils speak English as an additional language (7%). No pupils speak Welsh at home.

Cwmrhydyceirw Primary School is an English-medium primary school in Morriston in the Swansea local authority. Currently, there are 559 pupils on roll, aged from three to eleven, including nursery pupils who attend part-time. The three-year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 20%, which is broadly in line with the national average of 19%. The school identifies around 21% of pupils as having additional learning needs, close to the national average of 22%. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Most pupils are from a white British background. A very few pupils speak Welsh at home (1%) or speak English as an additional language (4%).

Ewloe Green Community Primary School is an English-medium primary school in the village of Ewloe near Queensferry in Flintshire local authority. There are 392 pupils on roll, aged from three to eleven, including part-time nursery pupils. English is the predominant language for nearly all pupils. A very few pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and learn English as an additional language. No pupils speak Welsh at home. The three-year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 5%, which is much lower than the Wales average of 19%. The school identifies that around 9% of pupils have additional learning needs, which is much lower than the Wales average of 22%. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs.

Gaer Primary School is an English-medium primary school on the west side of the city of Newport. The school has 487 pupils between the ages of 3 and 11, including part-time pupils in the nursery. There are 17 classes, including a resource base class in key stage 2 for pupils with a range of speech, behavioural and general learning difficulties. The average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals over the last three years is around 20%. This is similar to the national average of 19%. A minority of pupils are from a minority ethnic background (21%) which is higher than the Wales average of 13%. The school has identified 23% of its pupils as having additional learning needs, which is similar to the national average of 22%. This includes the pupils in the resource base class. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs.

Kiddies' World Playgroup is an English-medium non-maintained nursery setting that provides full day care in Acrefair, in Wrexham.

Little Acorns is an English-medium non-maintained nursery setting that provides full day care in the grounds of Crossgates CP School in Llandrindod Wells, in Powys.

Little Stars Day Nursery is an English-medium nursery that provides full day care in Pontypool, in Torfaen local authority.

Mount Stuart Primary School is in the Butetown area of Cardiff. There are 457 pupils on roll, aged from three to eleven, including part-time nursery children. The three-year rolling average of pupils eligible for free school meals is about 23%. This is slightly above the national average (19%). A very few pupils are of white British ethnicity. Most pupils are from various ethnic backgrounds (95%) and many speak English as their second language (71%). Very few pupils speak Welsh at home. The school identifies around 20% of pupils with additional learning needs. This is lower than the national average (22%). A few pupils have a statement of educational needs.

Pembrey CP School is in the village of Pembrey, about five miles from Llanelli in Carmarthenshire local authority. There are currently 231 pupils on roll between the ages of three and eleven, including part-time and full-time nursery pupils. The three-year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 25%, which is above the national average of 19%. The school identifies around 30% of pupils as having additional learning needs. This is well above the national average of 22%. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. A very few come from homes where Welsh is the first language.

Tremorfa Nursery School is a maintained nursery school in Cardiff local authority. It provides part-time nursery education for three and four-year-olds, with different groups attending the morning and afternoon sessions. There are currently 76 children on roll.

Trinant Primary School is in the village of Trinant, near Crumlin in Caerphilly local authority. There are 165 pupils on roll, including part-time nursery pupils. Over the past three years, around 34% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is well above the Wales average of 19%. The school has identified around 33% of its pupils as having additional learning needs, which is also well above the Wales average of 22%.

Ysgol Heulfan is in Gwersyllt, in Wrexham local authority. There are around 364 pupils on roll, aged between three and eleven years, including nursery children who attend on a part-time basis. The school also has a resource provision, comprising four classes for 34 pupils aged between three and fourteen years with profound and multiple learning difficulties. There is an additional provision for early years pupils, most of whom have non-verbal autistic spectrum disorder. Many of these pupils travel from outside the school's traditional catchment area. The average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals over the last three years is around 30%. This is well above the national average (19%). Most pupils are of white British ethnicity and speak English. Around 7% of pupils speak English as a second language and are developing competence in English. No pupils speak Welsh at home. The school identifies around 17% of pupils as having additional learning needs. This is lower than the national average (22%).

Woodlands Community Primary School is in Upper Cwmbran in Torfaen. There are 357 pupils on roll. This includes part-time pupils in the school's nursery class. The school organises pupils into a learning base for pupils with complex needs. Health visitors are based in the school and there is an Integrated Children's Centre on site. The three-year average for pupils eligible for free school meals is around 31%. This figure is well above the Welsh average of 19%. Nearly all pupils come from homes where English is the first language, and very few speak Welsh at home. The school has identified approximately 29% of pupils with special educational needs. This is above the national average (22%).

Appendix 3: Reading comprehension strategies







Strategy	Explanation
predicting	Helps readers to activate their prior knowledge so they begin to combine what they know with new material in the text
connecting	Efficient readers use a range of connections to comprehend text, such as: <ul data-bbox="608 734 1410 1189" style="list-style-type: none">• linking their life and personal experiences to the information in the text• thinking about what they know about the world outside their personal experience• thinking about other texts written by the same author or texts with common themes, style, organisation, structure, characters or content
comparing	Involves learners thinking more specifically about the similarities and differences between the connections they make
(self-) questioning	Thinking of questions before, during and after reading to assist with text comprehension (e.g. I wonder where the mother is in this story...did he ever know his mother?)
annotating text	Helps to identify key ideas or information and support reading for a particular purpose

Strategy	Explanation
summarising	Identifying the most important elements in the text and communicating these succinctly. Paraphrasing involves using these elements to re-write the text into a shorter passage.
synthesising	Bringing information together that may come from a variety of sources
skimming	Glancing quickly through material to gain a general impression or overview of content – getting to the general gist of what the text contains
scanning	Reading efficiently to locate specific details in response to a particular reading purpose
determining importance	Asking yourself what is most important in a phrase, sentence, paragraph, chapter or whole text to identify important concepts or ideas. Learners use features such as headings, subheadings, titles, illustrations, bolded text, icons etc. to help them.
inferring	Taking information from the text, making predictions, adding their own ideas, drawing conclusions and making judgements to create an interpretation of a text
deducing	Linking together different, explicit pieces of information and drawing a conclusion

Strategy	Explanation
activating prior knowledge and/or experience	Responding to teachers' questions at the start of shared or guided reading sessions; using 'before reading' activities, such as before and after charts, think sheets and KWL grids to consider explicitly what you know about a topic or subject and what you want to find out
using knowledge of morphology and etymology	<i>morphology</i> = using knowledge of the parts of words (e.g. prefixes, suffixes, roots) and families of words to work out meaning <i>etymology</i> = the study of the origin of words and the way in which their meanings have changed over time
self-monitoring	Being aware of when you are losing understanding and using one or more strategies to address this
visualising	Creating sensory images to support understanding

Appendix 4: Types of spelling errors



Type of spelling errors	Examples		Possible teaching strategies
Not phonologically plausible	Reversal of letters, such as siad for said and rihgt for right		Teaching of phonemes, such as vowel and consonant digraphs
Phonologically plausible but inaccurate	sok for sock carm for calm flud for flood		Teaching learners how to look at patterns of letters and syllables within words
Errors with sequential letter patterns in English	stahun for station flowr for flower cuogh for cough		Providing learners with opportunities to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • investigate other words with the same pattern (e.g. ‘-tion’ and ‘-sion’) • study words with common letter patterns but different sounds, such as rough, bough, cough
Errors due to a lack of awareness of morphemes	trapt for trapped helpfull for helpful ackwarium for aquarium happyness for happiness		Teaching prefixes, suffixes, root words and common rules. For example, most words ending in ‘f’ or ‘fe’ change their plurals to ‘ves’.

Type of spelling errors	Examples		Possible teaching strategies
Knowledge of homophones	where for wear allowed for aloud groan for grown stationary for stationery	➔	<p>Teaching learners how to isolate the parts of the words that are different, for example 'sow' and 'sew' and using the words in context</p> <p>Encouraging learners to identify ways of remembering tricky homophones, for example pen has an 'e', so the spelling is stationery, when you write about paper, pencils etc.</p>
Reversal and repetition of parts of words	was for saw bad for dad everery for every	➔	<p>Focusing on the way learners form their letters, reinforcing letter sounds</p> <p>Using multisensory approaches, such as writing in sand or shaving foam</p>
Errors due to not hearing or articulating sounds correctly*	wif for with	➔	<p>Focusing on developing learners' phonemic awareness and their ability to pronounce sounds precisely</p>

* It is important to consider whether there may be an underlying medical issue that may affect a learner's speech or hearing.

Glossary

advanced reading skills	Skills that enable learners to read a range of materials including complex literary and non-literary texts with confidence and understanding, and be able to respond well, verbally or in writing
adverbial phrases	An adverb is a word that describes or modifies a verb (for example, 'the river runs quickly') 'it floods frequently'. Adverbs often end in '-ly'. Adverbial phrases have the same function but use several words (for example, 'less frequently than other forms of transport', 'less reliable than expected').
alternative and augmentative communication systems	Systems and devices that aid communication for people who find it difficult to speak. This can include use of pictures, gestures and pointing, as well as digital technology.
ballad	A narrative poem that originally was meant to be accompanied by music
comprehension	A process of constructing meaning through the integration of readers' background knowledge with new information contained in the text
continuous and enhanced provision	Continuous provision refers to the use of resources that are continuously available in the indoor or outdoor classroom for learners to use independently. Enhanced provision refers to extra challenges or tasks that match the topic or interests of learners. Learners use these resources in addition to the usual continuous provision resources.

deduction	The process of linking together different, explicit pieces of information and drawing a conclusion
descriptions of learning	In <i>A Curriculum for Wales</i> (Welsh Government, 2020b) descriptions of learning provide guidance on how learners should progress within each statement of what matters as they journey through the continuum of learning.
disadvantaged learners	Disadvantaged pupils are pupils who may have barriers to succeeding in school because of detrimental circumstances beyond their control. These may include financial and social hardships within pupils' families including learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and learners from low income families.
emergent writing	In the early stages of writing development, learners experiment with marks to represent written language and emulate adult writing. Writing may include known letters, numbers, symbols and drawings.
etymology	The origin and history of a word or words
executive function	A set of cognitive skills that include working memory, flexible thinking, and self-control. We use these skills every day to learn, work, and manage daily life.
figurative language	Writers often use figurative language to add more interest or power their writing. Similes and metaphors are examples of figurative language.

four language skills	These are: listening, speaking, reading and writing.
guided reading or writing	In guided reading or writing, the practitioner teaches reading or writing to a small group of learners who are usually at similar levels of attainment. By working together, learners can also learn collaboratively with and from each other, discussing texts and how they are structured. Guided approaches to learning aim to help learners move towards independence.
high frequency words	Words that occur most often a language. Many of them are very common (for example, 'the', 'and', 'is'), and recognising them can help a reader to develop fluency.
higher order reading skills	These are identified as usually including the skills of location, reorganisation, inference, evaluation and appreciation. The context and level of sophistication with which these skills are used should be taken into consideration when planning teaching and learning. These skills should be taught to learners right from the start of their reading journey. They apply to literary and non-literary texts.
homonym	Each of two or more words having the same spelling or pronunciation but different meanings and origins
homophone	A word that is pronounced the same as another word but has a different meaning or spelling, or both

inference	Understanding information or views which are not explicitly stated
language delay	Used to describe a learner whose receptive and expressive language skills fall significantly below expectations (Law <i>et al.</i> , 2017)
late talker	Used to describe children between 18 – 35 months who acquire language at a slower rate than their typically developing peers. These children have limited expressive and/or receptive vocabulary.
literary and non-literary text types	Literary texts are to do with imaginative or creative writing and have the characteristics of narrative texts. Non-literary texts usually convey information and rarely use figurative language. Examples include advertisements, brochures, newspaper or magazine articles, editorials, explanation texts and instructions.
Makaton	A language programme that uses symbols, signs and speech to enable people to communicate
metacognition	The thought processes learners use to plan, monitor, and assess their understanding and performance in learning
mnemonic	A system such as a pattern of letters, ideas, or associations that assists in remembering something, for example to help learners remember how to spell words, such as 'necessary'

modelled reading or writing	Modelling gives learners an opportunity to see the processes good readers and writers use. Teachers demonstrate ways of approaching a text and what they think about as they read or write, so that learners can follow these examples. In reading, teachers model the use of phonological awareness; knowledge of phonemes, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency and visual literacy; as well as how to apply their understanding of different text types. They demonstrate reading behaviours, strategies and talk through their thought processes. In writing, teachers demonstrate the thoughts and actions that go into creating a text. For example, they teach the authorial elements of writing (such as sequencing, linking ideas and choosing appropriate words) or secretarial elements (such as employing spelling strategies and using correct punctuation).
morphology	This is the study of word parts: roots, prefixes and suffixes. This includes small changes to words, such as adding 's' to make a plural form.
multimodal texts	Texts that have more than one mode, such as print and image (still or moving) or print, image, sound and movement, to create meaning. Most of the texts we use in everyday life are multimodal, for example newspapers, magazines, websites and social media sites.
multisensory	This refers to activities or approaches that involve one or more of the senses.

narrative texts	A narrative text has a beginning, middle and end, characters, plot or conflict, and setting. Usually, narrative texts are written from the author's imagination.
onset-rime	Dividing a syllable into two parts: the onset is the beginning sound before the vowel; the rime is the string of letters that come after
oracy	Using language to communicate through listening, speaking and gesture, in a range of formal and informal contexts
oral rehearsal	There are varying interpretations of this term. It can refer to: talking about writing before a writing task, a strategy for helping learners to organise their ideas prior to writing, or practising sentences aloud before writing them down.
pedagogy	The study and theory of the methods and principles of teaching
personification	Giving human qualities to animals, things or abstract ideas
phoneme	The smallest unit of sound in speech. A phoneme is not a natural speech unit. Phoneme or phonemic awareness only develops when children are taught to read and write.
phonemic awareness	This is a subset of phonological awareness that concerns the listener's ability to distinguish and manipulate the smallest, meaningful elements of sound in words (i.e. phonemes).

phonics	Phonics is the study of the way in which symbols represent the sounds that make up words. Phonics teaching or instruction is a set of approaches used to teach reading and writing, which focus on the relationship between letters and sounds.
phonological awareness	This is usually understood as the ability to distinguish features of speech, such as syllables, onset-rime and phonemes.
prefix	A group of letters added to the beginning of a word to change its meaning, e.g. 'unclear'
progression steps	These are five reference points to show how learners should progress within each statement of what matters, as described in Curriculum for Wales guidance (Welsh Government, 2020b, p.35). They correspond broadly to expectations at ages 5, 8, 11, 14 and 16.
receptive and expressive language	Receptive language refers to the ability to understand spoken language, written words and gestures. This includes an understanding of vocabulary and grammar. Expressive language is the use of words, sentences, gestures and writing to convey meaning and messages to others.
scaffolding	The support given during the learning process that is tailored to the needs of the learner, with the intention of helping learners to achieve their learning goals

scanning	Looking for information by identifying key words and locating information around them
shared reading or writing	Shared reading or writing is an interactive process involving the teacher and learners. Learners join in reading or writing a text, supported by the teacher. In shared reading, the teacher explicitly models the skills of proficient readers, including reading with fluency and expression. The shared reading model often uses oversized books (referred to as big books) with enlarged print and illustrations or texts on an electronic whiteboard. In shared writing, learners contribute ideas to construct a text jointly, with the teacher often acting as the scribe.
sight vocabulary	Words a learner recognises on sight without having to decode them or work them out, usually high-frequency words
skimming	Reading to get an initial overview of the subject and main ideas of a text, perhaps by techniques such as reading the beginning and ending of paragraphs or reading down the middle of the page
special educational needs (SEN)	A learner that has a learning difficulty that calls for special educational provision to be made for them according to the Education Act 1996
spell-a-me-doodle	A drawing or picture created by a learner to practise spelling a word or words

statements of what matters	These are statements that identify key concepts in the areas of learning and experience in <i>A Curriculum for Wales</i> (Welsh Government, 2020b, p.35). Schools and practitioners must use the statements of what matters to guide the development of curriculum content.
suffix	A group of letters added to the end of a word to change its meaning (for example, from <i>'thought'</i> to <i>'thoughtful'</i> or <i>'walk'</i> to <i>'walked'</i>)
think alouds	This is an approach to teaching that involves the teacher vocalising their thought processes. This strategy provides the learner with direct access to the reader's, writer's, listener's or speaker's mind, as they are thinking.
visual and auditory discrimination	Visual discrimination is the capacity to differentiate forms, patterns, hidden shapes, or other pictures from alike items which vary from one another in subtle ways. Auditory discrimination refers to the ability to distinguish between heard sounds.
vocabulary development and vocabulary knowledge	Vocabulary development is learning words. Vocabulary knowledge is knowing the meaning of words.

word learning	Word learning or vocabulary development is the process by which we learn to understand and use new words. Word learning involves: learning to recognise and produce the sounds of the words; learning the meaning of the word; and learning how to develop the representation of the word and generalise the word correctly. For example, learning that 'dog' can be used to refer to all different types of dogs but cannot be used to refer to cats.
word consciousness	An awareness and interest in words and their meanings. When learners are given rich enough information, it helps them to understand the meaning of words, deeply and accurately.
word roots	The root of a word is its most basic form, to which other parts can be added. For example, the root of the word 'sitting' is 'sit'.
working memory	Working memory is a system for temporarily storing and managing the information required to carry out complex cognitive tasks, such as learning, reasoning, and comprehension.

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