

# Removing barriers to literacy

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The aim of this survey was to illustrate effective approaches that might help others to improve their practice in literacy. Inspectors visited providers of childcare, education and post-16 learning. The providers were selected because previous inspection evidence and data on achievement and attainment showed that they were particularly successful in enabling children and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds to make better than average progress and to achieve good standards of literacy.

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## Executive summary

The most recent Annual Reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, other reports by Ofsted and independent research have drawn attention to the fact that the attainment of particular groups of children and young people in literacy falls far below that of the rest of the population.<sup>1</sup> Despite gains over the past five years for some traditionally underachieving groups such as Black Caribbean boys, their attainment still falls far below the average for others. The underperformance of those from low-income families is very marked, particularly at secondary level, as is that of looked after children. If overall standards in literacy are to improve further, then they need to rise for these groups especially.

A recent report by Ofsted focused on the teaching of reading in 12 primary schools. Nationally, one in five children leaving primary school does not reach the standard expected for reading and writing. The report, *Reading by six: how the best schools do it*, highlighted the good practice of 12 outstanding schools across England representing a diverse range of communities. They showed that it is possible for all schools to achieve the highest standards.<sup>2</sup> It found that the best primary schools teach virtually all their children to read, regardless of their social and economic background, ethnicity, languages spoken at home, special needs and disability. The success of the 12 schools reflected their determination that every child would learn to read, together with a step-by-step approach to teaching reading, writing and spelling systematically through phonics.

This report looks at a wider age-range and types of provision. Between June 2008 and February 2010, inspectors visited 45 early years registered providers, 37 secondary and 61 primary schools, 21 colleges, 16 independent training providers, eight local authority providers of adult and community learning, and education provision in one prison and one young offender institution. They were selected because previous inspections and current data indicated strengths in their provision, and in the case of schools, particularly for those who were eligible for free school meals. The survey focused mainly on the following groups: pupils eligible for free school meals; looked after children (children in public care); and White British boys from low-income households. In the second year, the focus of the survey shifted, in all the schools selected for visits, to pupils known to be eligible for free school meals who were reaching at least average levels of attainment nationally in English. The intention was to identify good practice in supporting these learners. In the main, the

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<sup>1</sup> The term literacy in this report refers to the ability to read, write, speak and listen.

<sup>2</sup> *Reading by six: how the best schools do it* (100197), Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100197](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100197).

providers visited served areas of high socio-economic disadvantage and yet achieved outcomes in English that were at or above the levels expected nationally.<sup>3</sup>

In raising the attainment of learners in literacy who are most at risk of not gaining the skills they need for successful lives, the factors identified from visits on this survey included:

- teachers with high expectations for pupils' achievements in literacy
- an emphasis on speaking and listening skills from an early age
- a rigorous, sequential approach to developing speaking and listening and teaching reading, writing and spelling through systematic phonics
- sharp assessment of progress in order to determine the most appropriate programme or support
- carefully planned provision to meet individual needs
- rigorous monitoring of the impact of provision
- high-quality pastoral care to support learning in literacy
- highly effective use of time, staff and resources.

The report includes examples of how these factors were leading to measurable improvements. Importantly, inspectors identified practice in the successful providers visited that others could replicate. The most successful providers emphasised that there was no 'eureka' moment, that is to say, specific or unusual practice. Rather, they made what one school described as 'painstaking adjustments' to what they did when their monitoring provided evidence of weaknesses and 'stuck with what worked'. However, despite this success, the providers had seldom succeeded completely in narrowing the attainment gap for all groups of pupils. Inspectors did not find any examples of either primary or secondary schools focusing specifically on engaging the families of White working class pupils, despite the fact that this group of pupils is consistently among the worst-performing. Even the providers that were judged to be outstanding acknowledged that 'there is still more to do'.

Inspectors found many good examples, however, of early years registered providers and primary schools building strong relationships with parents and carers and supporting them, through training and advice, to further their child's literacy. Fewer examples were found of such work in secondary schools.

The schools visited that were less successful in narrowing the attainment gap set their sights too low for children from disadvantaged groups. Too many of the

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<sup>3</sup> At the end of primary school, separate assessments of writing and reading levels are available. In secondary schools, assessments are made of pupils' ability in English. English as a subject requires ability in literacy, but its scope is much broader. However, for the purposes of this report, inspectors used standards in English as a proxy for pupils' ability in reading and writing.

secondary schools visited during the survey paid insufficient attention to assessment data in English when pupils moved from Year 6 into Year 7. This resulted in some students working at levels not matched closely enough to their ability. Data showed their poor progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 in English.

In the provision for young people and adults, the most successful sessions were those where teachers drew on learners' experiences and ensured that learning activities were closely related to language used in everyday work and social settings. Learners were motivated by working towards qualifications in literacy. However, the National Tests of Literacy at levels 1 and 2, the nationally recognised assessments for adult literacy learning, did not assess writing skills sufficiently.<sup>4</sup> A very small minority of the learners were working towards qualifications that were at the same level as or lower than qualifications they had already passed, often in response to the entry requirements of further education programmes.

## Key findings

- The successful providers visited understood the often multiple barriers facing children and learners from disadvantaged groups which prevented them from acquiring literacy skills. However, only very few had consistent success in overcoming these barriers for all groups of children and learners.
- The most successful schools, colleges and other providers of adult education and training visited made outstanding use of national test and assessment data to raise the expectations of staff and to set sufficiently challenging targets.
- The most effective providers visited had at least one senior member of staff with an excellent knowledge of literacy and its pedagogy. They understood the stages of language development and how and when to provide additional support.
- The early years registered providers and primary schools visited understood the need to teach phonics rigorously and systematically and the importance of regular practice in reading. The primary schools visited in the second year of the survey all used a structured, systematic approach to teaching phonics. The teachers and teaching assistants led daily, discrete phonics sessions with groups of pupils for 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the age of the children.
- The most effective providers visited reflected on and adapted their curriculum, including any intervention programmes, to meet changing needs. They taught literacy in contexts that were relevant and meaningful to their learners. The staff identified learners' different starting points and needs accurately.
- Inspectors saw a wide variety of effective approaches to the teaching and learning of literacy that built on the consistent use of phonics. Many of the

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<sup>4</sup> For further information on The National Tests of Literacy, see:  
<http://rwp.excellencegateway.org.uk/readwriteplus/NationalTestLeaflet>.

approaches were in common use, but they were particularly effective in the providers visited because those teaching had consistently high expectations and the tasks set matched the needs of learners well.

- In the secondary schools where teachers in all subject departments had received training in teaching literacy and where staff had included an objective for literacy in all the lessons, senior managers noted an improvement in outcomes across all subjects, as well as in English. The high-performing colleges visited adopted similar strategies to improve outcomes.
- The successful schools visited often nominated learning mentors or staff to support looked after children and other pupils who were potentially at risk of underachieving. This ensured that they received continuity in terms of support and guidance, including prompt access to external agencies that were best equipped to tackle social and emotional problems that could affect learning.
- In the schools visited, a culture of good behaviour, mutual respect between staff and pupils and good partnerships with parents supported the learning of literacy well. In the colleges and other providers of education and training visited, the staff treated learners as adults and drew skilfully on their experiences to enliven the classes and ensure that learning activities were relevant.
- Even in the successful early years registered providers and schools visited, inspectors found that some groups of children and learners attained relatively less well in literacy. Nearly always, those known to be eligible for free school meals and, in the secondary schools, looked after children and White boys, in particular, underachieved relative to the other pupils.
- In the less successful secondary schools, the limited use of assessment data on pupils on transfer to Year 7 led to insufficiently challenging targets for some pupils.
- Headteachers sometimes limited their ambition for pupils because they measured success against the average for the pupil group rather than against the national average for all pupils. If the targets set for pupils from low-income families are below that of their peers, schools are less likely to succeed in narrowing the attainment gap.
- Virtual headteachers<sup>5</sup> found it difficult to gain accurate data on the progress of pupils who were looked after. Assessment information was often missing because looked after children were moved frequently. There was often a gap before a pupil's new school or local authority received information.

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<sup>5</sup> The Green Paper, *Care matters*, proposed that there should be a 'virtual headteacher' in every local area to oversee the education of looked after children and those placed outside the authority, to take responsibility as if she or he were the headteacher of a single school; *Care matters: transforming the lives of children and young people in care* (Cm 6932), DCSF, 2006; <http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publicatio ns&ProductId=CM+6932&>.

- Inspectors saw few instances of systematic phonics teaching in the secondary schools, colleges and other providers of adult education and training, despite the fact that for learners without a grasp of the link between sounds and letters, this knowledge is necessary to develop their literacy.
- For adult learners, the National Tests of Literacy, which many adult learners sat, tested reading skills but did not assess learners' writing. As a result, these did not offer learners and providers confirmation of improvement in writing skills.
- In five of the 22 colleges and other providers of adult education and training visited in the second year of the survey, learners were working towards outcomes that did not provide suitable challenge. In these settings, the qualifications learners were taking were at the same level or a lower level as the qualifications in English or literacy that they had passed previously.

## Recommendations

The Department for Education should:

- as part of its reform of performance tables, consider how to reflect the achievement and progress of pupils from disadvantaged groups, especially in literacy, compared with the national picture for all pupils.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills should:

- ensure that revisions to adult literacy qualifications include suitable assessment of learners' writing skills.

Schools should:

- teach phonics systematically as part of the teaching of reading and ensure that pupils' progress in developing their phonic knowledge and skills is regularly assessed
- ensure that governors regularly receive reports which include the progress and attainment in English of particular groups, such as White British boys and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals
- raise the expectations of staff for pupils from low-attaining groups, especially in Year 7, and use all available assessment information to ascertain their literacy needs and to set them challenging targets; this is particularly important to establish suitable expectations for GCSE English language
- consider nominating a member of staff to take responsibility for maximising the achievement of learners who are potentially at risk of failing to reach average levels of skills in literacy
- ensure that all teaching and support staff receive regular training in developments in teaching literacy



- ensure that assessment information is available and shared for all looked after children, and where it is missing request the information promptly from the relevant local authorities.

Learning and skills providers should:

- ensure that learners without a grasp of phonics receive the necessary teaching
- ensure that all teaching and support staff receive regular training in developments in teaching literacy
- ensure that learners work towards literacy qualifications which are at a higher level than those they have previously passed.

## Attainment in literacy

### The national picture

1. Successive reports by Ofsted, including the Annual Reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, have shown that there are particular groups of children and young people whose educational attainment falls well below that of the rest of the population. Research for the Skills for Life survey, conducted in 2003 for the then Department for Education and Skills, showed that 17.8 million adults (56% of the adult working population) in England had literacy skills below GCSE grade C (the equivalent of level 2).<sup>6</sup> Of these, 5.2 million (one in six of the adult population) lacked functional literacy; that is, the level needed to get by in life at work. This shows the negative impact of failing to gain literacy skills at school.
2. Previous reports by Ofsted have shown that there is a close association between poverty and low attainment.<sup>7</sup> However, this link is not inevitable. Ofsted's reports on 20 outstanding primary schools and 12 outstanding secondary schools, six of which were visited as part of this survey, showed that these schools, working in very challenging circumstances, were consistent in improving outcomes for young people whose circumstances made them potentially vulnerable.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *The Skills for Life survey: a national needs and impact survey of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills* (RR 490), Department for Education and Skills, 2003; [www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/RRP/u013476/index.shtml](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/RRP/u013476/index.shtml). The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has commissioned a further survey on basic skills in the workforce which is due for publication in late 2011.

<sup>7</sup> *White boys from low-income backgrounds: good practice in schools* (070220), Ofsted, 2009; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070220](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070220).

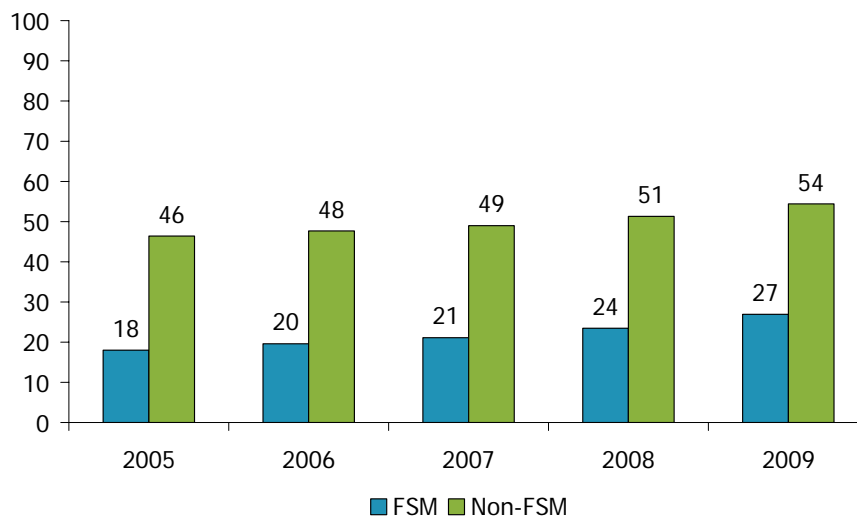
<sup>8</sup> *Twelve outstanding secondary schools – excelling against the odds* (080240), Ofsted, 2009; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080240](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080240); and *Twenty outstanding primary schools – excelling against the odds* (090170), Ofsted, 2009; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090170](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090170).

3. More recently, Ofsted's report *Reading by six: how the best schools do it* shows that the best primary schools in England teach virtually every child to read, regardless of the social and economic circumstances of their neighbourhoods, the ethnicity of their pupils, the languages spoken at home and most special educational needs or disabilities.<sup>9</sup> If some schools can do this, it should be a moral imperative for all primary schools. The report showed that primary – including infant – schools achieved very high standards in reading when they focused on this objective, adopted a consistent approach and made every minute of every lesson count.
4. Although standards in literacy have risen over the past five years, the gap in attainment between relatively advantaged and disadvantaged children remains wide. Some traditionally disadvantaged groups have made gains. For example, the gap between the performance of Black Caribbean boys and that of other boys at achieving five GCSEs at A\* to C has narrowed from 17 percentage points in 2005 to 10 percentage points in 2009. The performance of pupils who speak English as an additional language remains closely in line with that of other pupils. However, national data indicate that pupils who are eligible for free school meals reach much lower standards than their peers. For the last five years, for example, the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals gaining five GCSEs at A\* to C including English and mathematics has remained stable at around 28 percentage points below that of those not eligible.

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<sup>9</sup> *Reading by six: how the best schools do it* (100197), Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100197](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100197).

**Figure 1: Percentage of students eligible for free school meals compared with non-eligible students achieving five GCSEs at A\* to C, including English and mathematics**

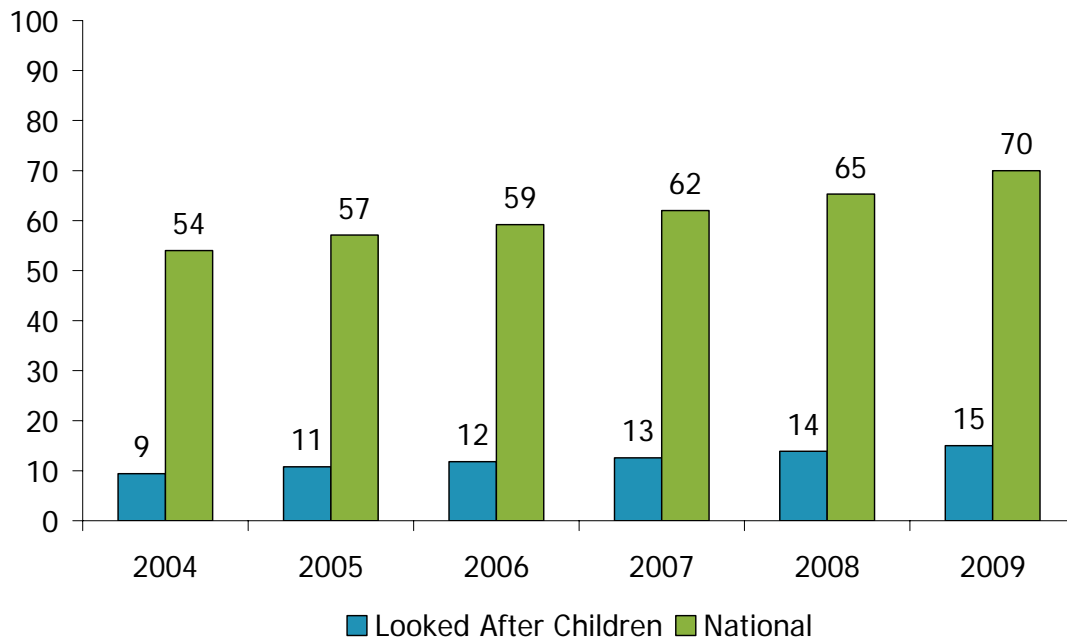


Figures are rounded.  
Source: Department for Education.

- The educational attainment of looked after children in English is very low. At Key Stage 2, the gap between their performance and that of other pupils of the same age has not closed over the last five years. At GCSE, it has widened as children who are not looked after have recorded much larger gains. The lowest attainment among looked after children is often associated with high levels of absence from school. In 2006, the Green Paper, *Care matters*, showed that looked after children are nine times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than their peers.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Care matters: Transforming the lives of children and young people in care* (03979-2006BKT), DfES, 2006;  
<http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=CM+6932&>

**Figure 2: Percentage of students looked after in care achieving five GCSEs at A\* to C, compared with national figures**

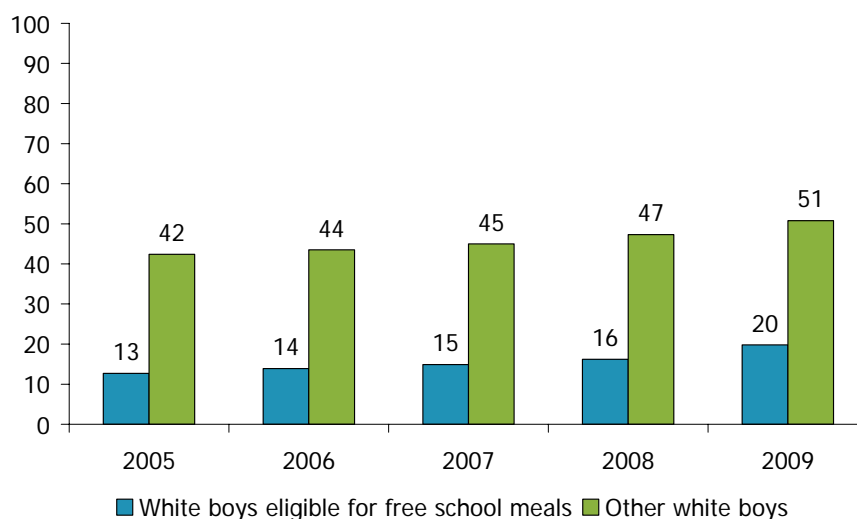


Source: Department for Education, Statistical First Release (SFR) on Outcome Indicators for Children Looked After, Twelve months to 30 September 2009 – England.

The figures for looked after children relate to GCSE and GNVQ qualifications; figures for all children relate to GCSE and all equivalent qualifications.

6. Data reveal that the children from the poorest backgrounds are most likely to be among the lowest-attaining groups. The underperformance in English of White boys eligible for free school meals is particularly marked, especially at secondary level. At the GCSE benchmark including English and mathematics, their performance was 31 percentage points below that of other White boys in 2009.

**Figure 3: Percentage of boys achieving five GCSEs at A\*-C including English and mathematics**



Figures are rounded.  
Source: Department for Education.

## A major challenge, even where overall provision is good

7. If young people and adults from disadvantaged backgrounds are to have better life chances, they must be helped to achieve at least the standards of literacy necessary to function effectively in society. Yet even in some of the relatively successful providers visited, inspectors came across pupils who were failing to gain adequate skills in literacy. Inspectors found this in pre-school provision and in primary and secondary settings.<sup>11</sup> Even in the very effective schools visited, although their disadvantaged pupils overall achieved well compared with similar groups of pupils nationally, high attainment did not follow universally.<sup>12</sup>
8. The schools visited were not always sufficiently aware of differences in the effectiveness of their provision for various groups of pupils and the reasons for the differences. Senior staff did not always analyse data on pupils' progress sharply enough. For example, one of the primary schools visited had been judged to be outstanding at its previous section 5 inspection. However, standards in English following the inspection were declining. Although the headteacher and senior leaders said that this decline had been predicted, they were unable to identify the reasons for it and so were not arresting the

<sup>11</sup> For adult learners, the National Tests of Literacy at levels 1 and 2 (GCSE equivalent) assess only reading and do not provide information on attainment in writing. As a result, the learners and providers visited did not have independent confirmation of whether their learners' writing had improved.

<sup>12</sup> 'Achievement' refers to the progress and success of pupils in their learning. 'Attainment' is measured by the standards reached by pupils as shown in test and examination results.

problem. The senior staff had not recognised that the achievement of the White British pupils, who were in a minority in the school, was particularly poor. In another case, 71% of Year 11 students in a secondary school had made the expected progress in English from the end of Key Stage 2 to 4; that is, they converted a level 3 in English at Key Stage 2 to a grade D pass at GCSE and a level 4 at Key Stage 2 to a grade C or above. However, inspectors noted that the progress of the White British students was 30 percentage points lower than that of other students in the same cohort.

9. Even though the secondary schools raised some doubts about the accuracy of the national test results in English at Key Stage 2 and their validity and usefulness for setting targets for English GCSE, the most effective secondary schools visited had a clear picture of what primary-aged pupils needed to know to achieve level 4 in the Key Stage 2 English national tests. This enabled them to build on what pupils already knew when the pupils moved into Year 7.
10. However, only three of the secondary schools visited in the second year of the survey did a comprehensive analysis of their students' progress and attainment in English when they had left primary school. They used the information to set challenging individual targets for GCSE English. In these schools, the proportion of students making two levels' progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 was well above the national average.

An outstanding inner-city secondary school had identified the link between students' clear goals and targets and improvements in their attitudes to literacy learning. It used early entry to GCSE English language to engage students early on, providing extra literacy support through homework clubs, Saturday tuition, holiday courses and extended opening hours.

A 15-year-old boy who was eligible for free school meals commented that his past weaker progress had been a consequence of his own unwillingness to engage in learning. He said: 'It wasn't until I started to do my GCSEs that I realised I had to work. The school helps me. I've got a mentor, teachers are available after school every evening and now I take them up on it, I am on track to achieve good results.'

## What barriers do learners face in literacy learning?

11. Of the barriers facing the youngest children in the providers surveyed, a common problem was some form of delay of their development in speech and language. In one nursery visited, for example, where almost all children were of White British origin, approximately 30% of the three-year-olds started nursery with a marked speech delay. Another common problem that placed children at early disadvantage was a disturbed start to their lives. In one nursery visited, most of the two-year-olds had already had some form of social care intervention by the time they joined the nursery.

12. Inspectors visited schools mainly in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage. These schools had a clear picture of the challenges facing them in raising the levels of literacy for their pupils. They cited:

- poorly developed speech, including a very limited vocabulary
- low aspirations in the home and few set routines or clear boundaries for children's behaviour
- poor attendance
- a reluctance by parents and carers to engage with the school
- limited experience of life beyond the immediate community.

While these challenges applied to both primary and secondary schools, the latter reported the last four more frequently.

13. Visits to the early years registered providers and schools confirmed the impact of the pupils' poor socio-economic circumstances. Although the children could often learn to decode print successfully in school, they were not always able to ascribe meaning to the words they could say because they did not have the experiences that the words described. This affected their progress in literacy in the longer term because it affected their comprehension of what they were reading.<sup>13</sup>

14. Except in two cases, the primary schools visited had not cited the disadvantages many of their pupils faced as excuses for underachievement. The schools knew of the difficulties and had planned the curriculum to enable the pupils to overcome a poor start, for example by developing their speaking and listening skills. Consequently, most of the pupils in these schools reached the nationally expected standards in English.

15. Almost all the secondary schools visited highlighted their concern about the low take-up of post-16 education of students with poor literacy skills. The schools were working hard to raise the value of literacy among students and their families. One school used sixth formers particularly effectively as mentors and support workers for younger students. Another had introduced a three-year sixth form programme to move learners, initially, to the equivalent of level 2 in

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<sup>13</sup> The 'simple view of reading' set out in the Rose review noted that '... word recognition is necessary but not sufficient for reading because ability to pronounce printed words does not guarantee understanding of the text so represented'. The conceptual framework presented in the report 'makes explicit to teachers that different kinds of teaching are needed to develop word recognition skills from those that are needed to foster the comprehension of written and spoken language'. See J Rose, *Independent review of the teaching of early reading* (0201-2006DOC-EN), DfES, 2006; <http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFES-0201-2006>

English and then on to level 3 courses.<sup>14</sup> Its aim was to 'get learners on to level 3, irrespective of their starting points'.

16. Ofsted's report *Reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training: what works and why* found that young people with low literacy skills on leaving school were more likely not to be in education, employment or training. The report emphasised the value of identifying mentors in order to get young people on track to gain qualifications.

'Essential to success was the quality of the relationships between the young people and an adviser, teacher or key worker who provided continuity of support and guidance to help them find a new direction and purpose to their lives.'<sup>15</sup>

17. The post-16 and adult learners who were interviewed by inspectors often commented on their previous, very negative experiences of school. They described how large classes, disruptions to lessons and the approaches to learning they had experienced all contributed to their lack of success in literacy. These learners continued to experience barriers which they attributed to their failure at school. The barriers included:

- a fear of 'losing face' in class and 'feeling thick'
- the stigma of attending a literacy class
- a fear of 'finding the work too hard' and 'not passing any exams'
- a fear of bullying.

18. Learners in and managers of post-16 provision cited additional obstacles:

- socio-economic and cultural factors, including experience of high levels of deprivation and third generation unemployment
- low family aspirations and a lack of role models at home
- practical considerations, such as the location of classes and the appeal of the venue. Learners attending classes in community settings saw large college buildings as intimidating
- health and welfare difficulties, including mental ill-health and physical impairment
- additional learning needs which had not been identified early on, such as dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

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<sup>14</sup> Level 2 and level 3 courses can be defined by their equivalence to GCSE and A level, respectively.

<sup>15</sup> *Reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training: what works and why* (090236), 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090236](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090236).



## Practice that works

19. The survey found that the approaches used by the successful schools and post-16 providers visited were straightforward and could be replicated by any other school or institution. The best providers focused on what pupils or learners needed to learn and developed a curriculum that provided them with the opportunities to make gains in literacy which were commensurate with their abilities. Inspectors did not uncover one single solution or solutions that were beyond the reach of other schools or providers.
  
20. The following sections provide more information about the practice seen in the schools and other providers visited that developed literacy skills well. These features were common across all the successful schools and elements of them were found in many of the providers:
  - staff with high expectations of what learners should achieve
  - an institution-wide emphasis on speaking and listening skills
  - a systematic approach to teaching phonic knowledge and skills
  - careful assessment and analysis of data to determine the next steps and most appropriate curriculum
  - carefully planned provision, which might include additional support or intervention, to meet individual needs
  - rigorous monitoring of impact
  - creative use of time, staff and resources
  - high-quality pastoral care, often supported by effective partnerships with parents and carers and with agencies beyond the school.
  
21. While the post-16 and adult provision was very varied, the best of the providers shared the following characteristics:
  - when literacy was part of a wider vocational programme, it was integrated effectively, so that it had immediate relevance
  - managers at all levels were acutely aware of the barriers that learners faced in improving their literacy and knew how to help them to overcome them
  - the teaching of literacy was consistently good or outstanding when it was provided by tutors who had had specialist training
  - teaching methods and content reflected a clear emphasis on treating learners as adults and responding to them as individuals
  - classes for adult learners rarely comprised more than 10 learners, allowing tutors to give learners good individual attention

- learners were well-motivated and worked enthusiastically towards qualifications in literacy
- provision for literacy formed part of a coherent, institution-wide approach to improving learners' English or numeracy (or both of these).

## High expectations

22. Leaders, managers and staff of the most successful providers visited were relentless in their focus on improving standards and raising achievement for all. Their success in helping vulnerable pupils to achieve well in literacy was attributable partly to the fact that the leaders never lost sight of this as their core purpose. For example, staff in one of the outstanding primary schools talked about 'catching the children and parents as soon as they come through the door and working to keep them with us, all the way'.
23. In the 37 secondary schools visited, leaders recognised the fundamental importance of students gaining literacy skills as a prerequisite to securing their life chances. In the most effective secondary schools, leaders promoted the acquisition of literacy in all subjects. Leaders of all departments had a clear understanding of what literacy skills students needed to learn because they had all been trained to teach literacy and it had a high profile in every department. These schools had a member of staff, often a former head of an English department, who was a 'literacy champion', working at a senior level within the school's leadership and management. These champions commonly attributed students' success in literacy to a combination of factors rather than to a single factor.
24. In addition to high-quality leadership and management, the following features of the successful secondary schools underpinned high expectations:
- high-quality teaching and learning in the English department
  - a bespoke curriculum, frequently offering a wide range of vocational options, but sustaining a strong focus on gaining at least functional literacy skills
  - keeping pupils on track to gain literacy qualifications by an excellent pastoral support system, including individual mentoring.

At a secondary school in the Midlands, pupils in Year 7 were encouraged to think about pathways to their future careers and the importance of gaining at least functional literacy skills. Fifteen years ago, only 33% of the pupils went on to further or higher education; now, almost all of them do.

25. For 16–18-year-olds in the colleges and independent training providers visited, a major aspect of success was the strong emphasis on learners gaining

qualifications that matched their abilities. The staff communicated the value of study and were effective in raising learners' expectations. They helped them to understand how setting their goals high in terms of gaining accreditation gave them a passport to what they wanted to do, such as particular vocational studies.

26. For adult learners in the providers visited, high expectations were signalled by the provision of a range of accredited routes to qualifications, the achievement of which soon became a strong source of motivation. The outcome was that learners were generally aware of the qualification they were working towards and what further qualification might follow. They talked with pride to inspectors of the literacy qualifications they had recently achieved.

## Speaking and listening

27. A common feature of the most successful schools in the survey was the attention they gave to developing speaking and listening. The teachers recognised the paucity of language skills and impoverished vocabulary of many of their pupils and adjusted their curricula to ensure that they developed the speaking and listening skills that were needed.
28. The eight early years registered providers visited that were taking part in the Every Child a Talker programme<sup>16</sup> had recently audited their indoor and outdoor areas to identify 'communication hot spots' where children spoke more, and also areas where children rarely spoke. Their findings highlighted that boys often engaged more in physical activities that demanded little talk. Subsequently, staff designed areas that encouraged collaboration and discussion for all pupils. For example, they set up activities for water play that required groups of children to collect and direct the flow of water, as well as construction activities that captured the imagination of the boys. The tasks could be completed successfully only if they listened to and communicated with one another.

Staff in a nursery were keen to capture children's views about which areas they liked to use best. They did this through a dog puppet to encourage the children to speak. The children showed the dog around the nursery and answered his question: 'Where is it good to talk to your friends?' 'I like going in the den outside'; 'on the carpet with the beanbags' and 'under the slide outside'. The staff set about creating 'communication friendly spaces'.

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<sup>16</sup> *Every Child a Talker – guidance for early language lead practitioners* (00854-2008DOM-EN), DfES, 2008; <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/153355>.

Staff in this setting talked enthusiastically about the changes they had made and the improved outcomes that were evident in the children's communication, language and literacy.

29. In the eight early years registered providers visited, the staff reported that, as well as finding that children were talking more with increased vocabulary, other improvements included:
- children showing a more sustained interest in activities
  - children with additional needs reaching the targets in their individual educational plan more quickly
  - improved behaviour, particularly for boys.
30. Inspectors also noted areas developed by staff in which children were able to hold quiet conversations. In one of the early years settings, staff created several small, welcoming spaces, using neutral colour shades and ceiling drapes to soften the lighting. A nursery created a quiet corner with calming beach scenes, natural objects, comfortable seating and a cosy blanket. The children visited this area to be quiet and often chose books to look at alone or to read and share with others. By choosing the reading materials carefully, the staff ensured that boys were keen to enjoy them, too. What was key to this provision was the staff's effective and careful monitoring of the area.
31. Inspectors noted adults speaking clearly and providing plenty of time and encouragement for children to respond to them in the most effective settings visited. The staff said that receiving training in speaking and listening had required them to consider how they talked to children. For instance, a teaching assistant said:
- ‘I have really noticed the difference in my conversations with children, since concentrating on the way I speak and listen. It's a bit like throwing a ball back and forth; the children are far more willing to talk because I really listen to them and pick up on what they're doing. Children just walk away if you start asking them endless questions like "What colour? How many?"’
32. Storytelling was an important aspect of the daily provision in the early years settings. Inspectors saw practitioners who were highly skilled at telling stories, both with and without books and even without words. Children were captivated and frequently used their imagination and props to retell, and often embellish, a story in their own words. Staff understood the positive impact this was having on developing fluency in the children's speech and their understanding of the structure of stories.

In one nursery visited, the staff provided special 'story chairs' in both the indoor and outdoor environments that were of exceptionally interesting

shapes and designs. These captivated children's imaginations, they wanted to sit on them and tell stories themselves. The seat of the outdoor chair could be lifted, revealing a box of props for the children to use when re-telling the stories.

33. It was important for children to be able to hear clearly and to concentrate. Six of the 12 childminders visited reported that they purposely did not have the television on in the background, saying that it made two-way communication more difficult; it prevented the children from hearing the childminder clearly and stopped the children from concentrating on other activities.

In one of the nurseries, staff noted that children used louder voices when playing outside and forgot to moderate these when returning indoors. They developed a board at child height with detachable visual prompts for 'indoor voices'. The system was so successful that staff extended it to include 'walking feet', 'listening ears' and 'helpful hands'. The children fetched the prompts and used them to remind each other of how they should behave. It led to a quieter indoor environment where children could hear well.

34. In the most effective schools visited, inspectors saw teachers thread rich opportunities for speaking and listening into lessons, as illustrated below. In turn, this led to improved standards in writing. Practical and creative activities triggered thoughtful discussions among pupils that helped them to shape their ideas and increase their vocabulary. The example shows how a simple resource enabled pupils in one high-attaining inner-city school to learn new vocabulary during the lesson.

Year 5 pupils had 15 minutes using a thesaurus to find new vocabulary which described the emotions of a character in a story. Once they found a new word that they thought was appropriate, they wrote it on a small sticky label and placed it on a large circular archery style target on their table. As they put the word down on the target, they had to explain to their group why they put the word in the relevant coloured band. The closer the pupils felt the word fitted the character's emotions in the story, the closer to the centre of the target they placed it. The teacher then asked the groups to explain to the class which words they had placed close to the centre and why. This simple technique helped to focus pupils' discussions on the meaning and appropriateness of new words in a context which aided their understanding of how to use them. The pupils were asked to include the words placed on the 'bull's-eye' when writing about how their character felt. The result was that all the pupils had increased their vocabulary and were confident and excited about using their new words, which improved the standard of their writing.

35. The most effective early years registered providers and schools made close links between speaking, listening, reading and writing. For well over 10 years, one very successful school reported using its own 'I am' books to promote early reading and writing.

The children in the Reception class helped to write a book about themselves as their first reading book. The child talked to the teacher and the teacher helped the child to choose the vocabulary in the book because it was relevant to their lives. The system capitalised on the egocentricity of young children, basing the story structures on 'I'. Children quickly built up a bank of vocabulary of their own choice that they could recognise on sight. The teacher imposed none of the vocabulary.

The teachers introduced punctuation from the start. For example, 'I am [name...]. I like Wolverhampton. I like going shopping with my mummy'. The school was rigorous in ensuring that the pupils understood the differences between spoken and written language. By the end of the Reception year, the children typically had a vocabulary of 70 words that they could recognise on sight and a good proportion of them had a much bigger vocabulary. By the end of Key Stage 1, all the pupils had achieved at least level 2; one third of the pupils achieved level 3 in reading. Standards in writing have been significantly above average every year since 2003.

The staff believed the 'I am' programme was central to success, observing:

'When Reception children are using basic punctuation with flair, producing a page of almost correctly spelled, imaginative writing independently, it became very obvious when older children were not! Expectations throughout the school increased and generally standards were raised, as seen in our national test results.'

36. In another inner-city school, serving a high proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, staff paid close attention to the difference between standard and non-standard English in spoken language. Pupils were quick to correct themselves when they used words such as 'ain't' and 'gotten' in their speech when responding to questions from teachers. They explained to inspectors how teachers and assistants taught them to use standard English by reminding them constantly during conversations and in lessons. They were encouraged to focus on using standard English during class debates, in giving presentations and in their writing. Standards in writing at this school were high.
37. Three of the 28 primary schools visited in the second year of the survey provided timetabled weekly drama sessions aimed at improving the pupils' range of vocabulary and expression. In one of these schools, the staff had created a drama studio from a spare hall, complete with blackouts and stage

lighting. The school reported that, since the drama studio had been introduced, pupils 'explored their emotional responses to real life situations more confidently and practised their thoughts out loud before writing'. Teachers' assessments noted pupils' improved fluency in their writing and their extended vocabulary. Attainment at this school was high and all the pupils who were eligible for free school meals attained level 4 in English.

38. In the two other inner-city schools that timetabled drama sessions, because space was limited, all the classrooms, including those in Key Stage 2, had a designated space for drama through role play. The schools emphasised to inspectors the importance of role play in developing pupils' ideas and vocabulary in order to improve their fluency and their capacity to write at length. This is illustrated in the following example.

During a geography lesson, a Year 6 class was studying the effects of climate change. A role play area was set up as a TV interviewer's news desk. The display was a list of helpful prompts, which included:

- introductions, such as, 'On my left I have... who is representing the...'
- openers, such as, 'Tell me about your recent experience in...'
- final remarks, including, 'Thank you to... for providing us with information on...'
- recent pictures and news items showing the impact of global warming in the Arctic
- a computer link to digital news content on an intranet site designed for primary age pupils.

Inspectors saw pupils conducting rigorous 'interviews' with climate change activists (other pupils) on their actions to save polar bears in the Arctic. The school also invited visitors to the news desk for pupils to interview about current events. Pupils' exercise books showed clearly the link between their role play and the high quality of their writing.

39. Where inspectors saw links between oral language, reading and writing in lessons with secondary school students, standards at GCSE English language were higher. Frequently, in the best lessons seen, close links between these different areas of language were evident in the confident way students talked about their ideas, often with a partner, before starting to write. An example of this was an outstanding English lesson on *Macbeth* with Year 9 students.

The students discussed the question, 'What does tension mean to you?' which was quickly related to, 'Why may Macbeth feel tension?' and 'How will an actor display this tension on stage?' The students used their knowledge of the play to discuss the reasons for Macbeth's guilt, tension and fear and how to demonstrate these to an audience. They shared their ideas with the class, using spidergrams to capture these visually. The

teacher moved the lesson on to discuss how Shakespeare used punctuation to raise the tension, focusing on Macbeth's soliloquy in Act 1, Scene 7. The students practised the speech out loud in pairs without punctuation and then joined small groups to hypothesise how to punctuate it effectively to increase the tension. The groups discussed their ideas with the rest of the class, explaining clearly why they had chosen their punctuation. The teacher then showed them the punctuation in the published version of Shakespeare's play, helping the students to understand how he had used rhythm to create an emotional impact. In analysing Shakespeare's verse, the students had come to a better understanding of the text, enabling them to write an effective analysis.

40. In the colleges and other providers of adult education and training visited, tutors frequently integrated listening and speaking with reading practice or preparation for writing. For example, in a level 1 adult literacy class, the learners were required to scan a newspaper to find a text that interested them, read it in detail and then summarise it orally. In an entry level class, a tutor asked carefully structured oral questions on a poem to establish the correct use of conjunctions.

The tutor asked learners why they liked the writer. Each responded with a sentence starting, 'I like her because .....'. The tutor followed this with questions which elicited responses including either 'and' or 'but', the topic of previous sessions. Learners then identified which of the three ('and', 'but' or 'because') were needed to complete sentences the tutor had written on the whiteboard, before completing a similar written exercise on a worksheet.

41. Discussions and work with partners were common features in all the adult literacy lessons seen. The ability of the tutor to lead question and answer sessions, probing the understanding of the learners, helped their success.

## Teaching phonics

42. In the schools visited in the first year of the survey, the teaching of phonics was both less evident and less consistently effective than that seen in the second year.<sup>17</sup> For example, in three of the early years settings, adults judged that their children were 'not yet ready for phonics work'. They planned for speaking and listening activities – an important precursor for work in phonics. However, the planning did not systematically identify the precise listening and oral skills that enable most young children to distinguish quickly between speech sounds and blend and segment sounds in words orally. Outcomes in the

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<sup>17</sup> The samples of providers visited in each of the two years, however, should not be compared and were not chosen to be representative of providers nationally.



Early Years Foundation Stage Profile in these schools showed that some children were not working at the nationally expected literacy levels by the age of five.

43. In one of the schools visited, it was evident that teaching in Key Stage 1 failed to build upon the good practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage. For example, in the two Key Stage 1 classes, planning for reading and writing activities did not take into account the children's earlier learning in phonics. Consequently, activities went over ground covered earlier. Two of the six junior schools visited had not made a connection between pupils' poor spelling and the school's lack of a rigorous approach to phonics teaching.
44. In one of the successful schools visited, however, staff referred to the positive difference that implementing the Letters and Sounds programme had made to their pupils' progress in learning to read and write.<sup>18</sup> Outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile for communication, language and literacy bore out this improving picture. The staff told inspectors how their own expectations of what pupils could achieve at a young age had risen following the recommendations in the Rose Review. This was also a finding reported in an earlier survey by Ofsted.<sup>19</sup>
45. In all the primary schools visited during the second year of the survey, the effective systematic teaching of synthetic phonics was helping to drive up standards in reading and writing. The key factors of this approach included:
  - teaching letter–sound correspondences
  - how to blend (synthesise) individual sounds together to read words
  - how to break up (segment) the individual sounds in words to spell them.
46. The practice seen in these schools confirmed that 'fidelity to the programme', whichever one the school was using, and systematic implementation were key to success. The Rose Review of early reading noted that:

'Once started, what has been called "fidelity to the programme" is also important for ensuring children's progress. Experience shows that even high quality programmes founder if they are not applied consistently and regularly. It can be unwise to "pick and mix" too many elements from

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<sup>18</sup> *Letters and sounds: Principles and practice of high quality phonics* (00281-2007FLR-EN), DCSF, 2007; <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/84969>.

<sup>19</sup> *Responding to the Rose Review: schools' approaches to the systematic teaching of phonics* (080038), Ofsted, 2008; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080038](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080038).

several different programmes because this often breaks up important sequences of work and disrupts planned progression.<sup>20</sup>

47. The 22 primary schools visited in the second year of the survey all used a highly structured, systematic approach to teaching synthetic phonics. The teachers and teaching assistants led daily discrete phonics sessions with groups of pupils for 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the age of the children. Eleven of the schools grouped pupils by their ability in terms of phonics. The Rose Review noted:

‘Grouping children for phonic teaching, within an early years setting or class, by matching work to their pace of learning and developing abilities, is often done to good effect... Practitioners and teachers must exercise professional judgements about organising teaching groups to provide optimum conditions for learning. In these respects, good practice in phonic work simply reflects good practice in general.’

Inspectors noted that these schools met pupils’ learning needs well and most of the pupils attained or exceeded national expectations in their reading assessments at the age of seven.

48. Staff in the most effective schools made close links between skills in early reading and writing. In these schools, pupils in the Reception year and Year 1 wrote down simple sentences dictated to them as part of their phonic session. It was rare for any pupil not to reach the end of Year 2 without being able to decode words. The three primary schools visited where attainment and achievement in the English national tests for 11-year-olds were highest had long-established, exemplary practice in teaching phonics.
49. Some of the schools visited had devised their own phonic programmes; others used published schemes. There was no notable difference in attainment or achievement between these schools, since all the programmes implemented linked closely to the recommendations in the Letters and Sounds programme. Phonics teaching in the very effective schools was successful because of the following factors:
- All staff had a thorough knowledge of the school programme and were well-trained to teach phonics.
  - Staff taught the programme with enthusiasm and captured the children’s interest and attention effectively.

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<sup>20</sup> J Rose, *Independent review of the teaching of early reading* (0201-2006DOC-EN), DfES, 2006; <http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publicatio ns&ProductId=DFES-0201-2006>.

- The assessment of pupils' understanding of letters, sounds and words was frequent and record-keeping was meticulous.
- The pupils were taught phonics daily.
- Pupils were taught in small groups matched to their attainment in phonic knowledge and skills.
- Well-trained teaching assistants as well as teachers led some of these groups.
- Resources were matched appropriately to pupils' age and ability. Both published materials and materials created by teachers reinforced learning in the classroom effectively and through homework.
- Parents understood and were involved in the school's system for teaching reading and spelling. They worked well in partnership to support their children.

50. Inspectors noted frequently that the most effective acquisition of phonic knowledge and skills involved the regular repetition and practice of what pupils knew before they applied it to a new context. An inspector's notes following a visit to an outstanding school showed that it was not the materials alone that made the difference, but the systematic and enthusiastic way that phonics was taught.

The lesson plan for phonics used a popular published scheme. The 80 pupils across two year groups (Reception and Year 1) were divided into eight ability groups. The children moved to break-out rooms and the lesson lasted for 30 minutes. All the staff leading the lessons were well-trained, although not all of them were teachers. Parents could join the lessons if they wished; many did so regularly.

Familiarity with the published materials was evident and the children were very accustomed to the daily routines. All the children focused on what they were doing and no-one refused to make some attempt at answering questions. A good mix of words, pictures and objects was used to help the children to identify the sound practised and to secure the understanding of those who were at an early stage of learning English. Physical actions supported the work on learning sounds. Quick-fire questions built on the familiar: 'What sound? What sound when I add...? What is this...? Let's all say...'

51. In another high-attaining school, two classes of Year 1 pupils worked in five groups, organised by ability, for daily 20-minute sessions. An inspector observed a group of 14 pupils practising phonics.

This was a formal session. Positions on the carpet were set out with the pupils' names and the teacher had chosen their 'learning partners' for

them in advance. Discipline was excellent and the pupils were highly attentive and responsive throughout. Following the practice of a ditty and revision of the /ay/ sound from an earlier lesson, 'two letters, one sound', the teacher quickly moved the pupils on to read a sentence: 'A dog on a log', reminding them to 'hold a sentence'. The pupils repeated the sentence together, counting the number of words on their fingers. The teacher wrote it again on the smart board without full stops or capital letters. She asked the pupils what was missing. The pupils pointed out the lack of punctuation correctly. They then moved to sit at their tables and wrote the sentence in their exercise books. The teacher carefully scrutinised their letter formation, reminded some pupils about their pencil grip and checked their posture. Half the pupils wrote the sentence correctly with punctuation. Four more spelt all the words correctly without all the punctuation. The remaining three struggled with spelling 'on'. Using magnetic letters, the teacher provided additional support.

The pupils' books showed that this sort of work was common practice. There was nothing startling about the content of this lesson. However, the teaching was highly systematic; the pupils were used to the daily routine and clearly made excellent progress.

52. Another example from a high-attaining inner-city school showed how a teacher used assessment effectively to check the pupils' understanding.

A Year 1 primary class were learning four groups of letters; 'or', 'ur', 'ow', 'oi'. The class teacher ended the 15-minute session with a simple assessment task. Without reading it out loud, she showed the pupils the following sentence – 'Miss has a brown belt on today' – on the interactive whiteboard to test their comprehension skills and their knowledge of the understanding of the 'ow' grapheme. She then asked pupils to read the sentence silently to themselves. On a count of three, pupils were asked to show if the statement was true by putting their thumbs up or down. She quickly scanned the class to check on all the pupils and to record the initials of those who had got the answer wrong so that she could follow them up in the next day's session.

53. At all the nursery or pre-school settings visited, staff had received training specifically aimed at developing aspects of children's communication, language and literacy. Inspectors saw practitioners guiding children well in learning letter names and sounds. Carefully planned activities supported children's learning effectively, as in the following example.

A childminder provided magnetic letters as part of the everyday activities. Frequent playing with the shapes and naming them enabled the four-year-old child to recognise and make the sound represented by each shape. He

was able to find the shapes for the sounds of the letters in his own name and to put them down in the correct order.

Another four-year-old sorted through plastic letter shapes, making the sounds that each one represented. He also knew that when some letters are placed together, they made new sounds such as /oo/ and /th/.

54. In the settings described above, as recommended by the Rose Review, children were involved in daily sessions in recognising letters and words and a variety of play activities where they could consolidate their skills. Numerous opportunities to read and write their own names, other words and simple sentences ensured that they had no difficulty in making the transfer to reading longer texts. Rhymes and songs were commonplace and children obviously enjoyed playing with words.
55. Ten of the 33 primary schools visited in the first year of the survey had extended phonics teaching into Key Stage 2. They modified the programmes to match the abilities and interests of their pupils, as in the following example.

*Letters and Sounds* was already being used successfully in the Reception class and Key Stage 1. Therefore the school decided to adapt it to help Key Stage 2 pupils who were having difficulties with reading and writing. All the staff received further training in phonics and additional resources were bought to help the older children. The school also organised a workshop for parents to advise them on how to provide further support at home. The pupils enjoyed the programme, which involved a combination of in-class support and additional one-to-one sessions. As a result, their ability to decode words improved markedly.

56. In the second year of the survey, all the primary schools visited had extended phonics teaching into Key Stage 2 for pupils who were working below their peers in terms of reading and writing. However, only two of the five junior schools visited were using such an approach systematically.
57. A small number of the secondary schools visited used a phonic approach with their Year 7 pupils. One secondary school used rigorous half-termly assessments of pupils' progress in reading and spelling to identify underachieving groups who might benefit from specific phonics intervention.

The students, taught in groups of seven, were given guidance based on familiar spelling rules that were relevant to their work in other subjects.

As additional support for students whose reading problems were a barrier to their learning across the curriculum, the school considered ways of tackling gaps in their reading. For students in Years 7 and 8, the school decided to use a commercial scheme with all its withdrawal groups. The school chose this approach because it felt it would cover a number of

areas where students' skills were weak; namely, phonic knowledge, reading comprehension, reading fluency and handwriting. Over five months, the average accelerated progress of a Year 7 pupil on the programme was:

- 7.4 months' gain in word reading
- 9.1 months' gain in reading
- 7.8 months' gain in spelling.

The school invested time and resources in training teaching assistants to provide the programme effectively.

Students on the programme sustained the gains they had made and the school's data showed how the initiative had narrowed the gap between these students and their peers in English and in other areas of the curriculum.

58. Inspectors saw few instances of systematic phonic teaching in the post-16 providers visited, despite the fact that, for learners without a grasp of the link between sounds and letters, this knowledge was necessary to develop their literacy. Tutors tended to see phonics as part of a wider repertoire of strategies and most suitable for those at entry level. In the providers where tutors had identified that using phonics might help a learner, the results were often good. For instance, a 30-year-old adult learner explained how learning phonics was helping him with reading and writing:

When I came here I couldn't make a sentence or read a sentence. Now I can do that on my own. The way the teacher helps me, I understand. The teacher does a lot of work with sounds. If you write a word she lets me sound it so I can break it down and know what it is. Very helpful because if I pronounce the whole word I can't spell it, but if I break it down, I can.

59. Tutors regularly integrated elements of phonics with other strategies for word-building and improving spelling. Lessons focused on simple techniques such as learning about syllables within words. In one provider, learners were using highlighter pens to find similar spellings in words to answer the question, 'What other words end in ...?' The learners also appreciated learning mnemonics to help their spelling memory, reciting to inspectors examples they had learnt by heart. In an independent specialist college, a tutor combined phonics imaginatively with other approaches to help a learner on an equine studies course to prepare for a written test on the anatomy of horses.

In the first part of the session the tutor worked from a book, using a phonic approach to help the learner read aloud the names of muscles, such as 'rhomboid', 'gluteal', 'intercostal', 'sternocephalicus' and 'brachiocephalicus'. This was followed up in the stable yard, where the

learner wrote the names of muscles she could remember on sticky notes which she placed on the appropriate part of a horse's body, checking with the tutor whether the spelling and the placement were correct.

## Assessment

60. Staff in the early years registered providers visited knew the individual children they provided for extremely well. They developed excellent partnerships with parents and were keen to find out about children's preferences. In the most effective settings, staff met daily to discuss individual children's needs. Carefully planned activities based on assessment of children's knowledge, skills and understanding developed their early confidence in communication, language and literacy.
61. The most effective schools visited carried out regular, formal assessments of pupils' progress in literacy alongside the daily assessment of progress in lessons and through marking pupils' work. Record-keeping was meticulous. The schools shared the results of assessment regularly with parents and regarded this as a critical element to securing success in literacy. In one of the schools visited, a parent who had dyslexia told inspectors that she was grateful that the school made the assessment record simple to understand, because it gave her the confidence to ask the teacher for extra help for her daughter.
62. All the schools surveyed used the national test materials for benchmarking pupils' progress annually in literacy. Inspectors found a wide range of additional reading, writing and spelling assessments. They used these effectively to tailor the curriculum and to provide programmes of additional support.
63. In the most effective schools visited, staff regularly used analytical and diagnostic assessment tools, such as running records,<sup>21</sup> to identify pupils' strengths and weaknesses. Although the schools acknowledged that these assessments were time-consuming, pupils benefited because the staff frequently checked for strengths and errors in reading to identify recurring patterns. As a result, they knew their pupils' abilities in literacy exceptionally well and had robust methods for identifying weaknesses, including specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Because assessment and record-keeping were thorough, staff were quick to identify and secure expert advice and additional support for both pupils and their parents where necessary.
64. In the best lessons seen, as the basis for assessing the pupils' learning, the teachers clarified what they were expected to learn during the lesson, the ways they would work and the criteria for judging whether they had been successful.

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<sup>21</sup> A running record enables a teacher to analyse systematically the errors that a pupil makes as she or he is reading and the approaches being used.

The pupils were clear about what might constitute a good piece of writing and they were guided to check their 'steps to success'. During the lessons, the teachers monitored pupils' progress, supported slower learners effectively and gave judicious praise when pupils were meeting the expectations that had been agreed. For example, in a Year 2 lesson seen, the teacher praised the pupils for 'using a good '-ly' word, a connective of time (such as 'Once...' or 'Afterwards...') and an 'imperative or bossy word'. All these were set out in the success criteria for the lesson and the pupils knew immediately whether they had been successful.

65. Teachers in the most successful primary and secondary schools had a clear focus on helping pupils to meet the success criteria that they had set out for their written work. These criteria were often linked closely to external examination requirements. The teachers used the criteria closely in their marking and frequently gave pupils excellent guidance that showed them how to improve their work. High-quality teaching and marking in literacy in these schools contributed well to the pupils' high attainment. Inspectors saw several lessons where students analysed each other's scripts, rigorously applying the success criteria for GCSE English language.

In a Year 11 lesson in a high-attaining school, the students disagreed with the mark awarded to a piece of work by the teacher, saying she had been 'too generous'. They were able to point to the examination success criteria saying there were 'errors in syntax, spelling and a lack of interesting vocabulary', although they acknowledged the author's fluent personal style. The teacher agreed with the students and commented to the inspector that to have such debate showed the good level of the students' understanding.

66. Providers of learning for adults commonly used specimen test papers effectively to check learners' readiness to sit national tests and to provide them with practice in completing formal assessments. This was particularly valuable for those learners with little successful or recent experience of sitting examinations.
67. All of the 22 adult learning providers visited in the second year of the survey assessed new learners carefully. They routinely used written tests in initial assessments to identify learners' skill levels against national standards for literacy. They followed up on these well with more detailed diagnostic tests to pinpoint specific gaps. They combined test outcomes effectively with detailed individual interviews to establish learners' aspirations and preferred ways of learning.
68. In five of the 22 adult learning providers visited in the second year of the survey, learners were working towards outcomes that did not provide suitable challenge. In these settings, the qualifications learners were taking were at the



same level or even a lower level as the qualifications in English or literacy which they had passed previously. The reasons the providers gave for this included:

- restrictions on funding available for literacy qualifications above level 2
- wishing to provide learners with a qualification that included a writing assessment, such as Key Skills Communication<sup>22</sup>
- stipulation in the entry requirements for some further education courses that learners needed a level 2 (or equivalent) qualification in literacy that was, typically, no more than three to five years old.

Although, in some cases, the opportunity for learners to refresh their skills was beneficial, in others this was a waste of time and money for learners and the providers alike.

## Using data effectively

69. As in previous surveys, inspectors found that effective analysis of data on progress contributed strongly to successful provision in literacy. In the best instances seen, the effective use of data raised the expectations of staff, pupils and learners, as in this example.

The headteacher of a successful primary school said: 'We no longer use contextual data to set targets because we work on the basis that all pupils will gain level 4. If teachers have a different view, they need to explain why. We work on a "100% down" model rather than the other way round. "Bottom up" builds in underachievement and we won't allow this.'

This school used assessment information very effectively to hold staff to account for ensuring that all its pupils reached the levels expected for their age. Those at risk of underperforming were identified and specifically named as part of a teacher's annual performance targets.

70. In the first year of the survey, it was rare to find primary schools analysing data by the characteristics of pupil groups. However, this was more common during the second year, possibly linked to the introduction of the revised inspection framework for schools in September 2009.<sup>23</sup> Where schools focused closely on attainment and progress by pupil group in addition to the progress of individuals, overall results were outstanding.

<sup>22</sup> Key Skills Communication is a national qualification comprising two components: a pass in the national test of literacy at level 2 and a portfolio of evidence confirming learners' reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. For further information, see: [www.qcda.gov.uk/qualifications/6234.aspx](http://www.qcda.gov.uk/qualifications/6234.aspx).

<sup>23</sup> *Framework for the inspection of maintained schools in England from September 2009* (090019), Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090019](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090019).

71. In most of the schools visited, inspectors noted weaker performance in literacy for pupils who were eligible for free school meals. However, only a handful of the best schools had identified this as a key area of concern and had plans to tackle the underperformance. Notably, in the second year of the survey, all three of the primary schools visited where all pupils attained at least the nationally expected standards analysed their data for the different groups of pupils. A similar analysis took place in the most effective secondary schools. They made strenuous efforts to secure additional support for any pupils at risk of failing to reach the nationally expected standards.
72. All the schools in the survey had access to a wide range of performance data. However, not all of them used the data effectively to adapt their literacy provision for different groups. The example below typifies the effective analysis of data by an excellent subject leader in a primary school, which led to improvements in pupils' reading standards.

The subject leader noticed that the reading ages of a small group of pupils reached a plateau in Years 3 and 4 and were not meeting her high expectations. She looked for the reason. Following classroom observations and discussions with staff, she discovered that daily reading practice ceased in Year 3 and the teachers relied on a weekly guided session and on parents to listen to children reading at home. Although this was satisfactory for some of the pupils, progress for those not reading at home slowed significantly. She set up a group called 'reading champions' specifically for the identified pupil group, using ideas from the National Literacy Trust, and encouraged the older children to lead reading sessions at lunchtimes. This was so popular that she extended it to breaks and before school. As a result, the reading ages of the pupils in the identified group increased at the same rate as those of their peers, as did their confidence in reading.

73. In the secondary schools visited, good provision for students in Year 7 was associated with comprehensive analysis of Year 6 test data by heads of Year 7 and literacy leaders, heads of English departments or both.

A high-attaining secondary school scrutinised the gap between individual pupils' reading and writing scores from the end of key stage tests in Year 6. This analysis led to discrete literacy lessons continuing in Year 7 and to the grouping of pupils by ability for weekly reading sessions. The school also scrutinised pupils' individual Key Stage 2 work alongside their test scores to support its assessment analysis. Students at the school consistently attained high standards in English language at GCSE.

74. In the colleges visited, leaders and managers monitored and recorded results and success rates in external accreditation, including national tests, thoroughly

and used the results of their analyses to set challenging targets for improvement in literacy across the college.

## Carefully planned provision

75. The most effective providers visited provided a curriculum that was effective in meeting the differing needs and interests of their learners and had a strong focus on basic skills.
76. In all the early years registered provision visited, staff linked activities closely to children's interests, extending their vocabulary well. For example, staff in a nursery noticed a child's interest in play fruits. The next day, they brought in a wide variety of interesting fruits for him to cut and taste. With a staff member, children cut and studied, smelled and tasted, all the time extending their vocabulary as they chatted about what they were doing.
77. Inspectors noted the positive impact of outdoor provision in the early years registered providers in developing children's language skills. All the settings visited provided suitable clothing, such as waterproof playsuits and wellingtons, so that the children could play comfortably outside whatever the weather. Staff targeted resources well to promote boys' language development successfully. One of the nursery settings had a builder's hut, another had a superhero den, as well as play houses in the outdoor area.

In a nursery with many children from army families, staff created an outside 'army den'. Walls draped with camouflage netting created a safe enclosed space but also let the children see out and the staff see in. Interesting items had been chosen to spark conversations and imaginary play, such as camping stoves, torches, binoculars and maps. Alongside was a large tray of mud with army figures and vehicles and maps of Afghanistan and Iraq fixed to the fence. Pencil cases with pens and pencils also hung from the fence and there were large sheets of paper and note pads. This was a theme with which children were familiar and it was used extensively, especially by boys, thus increasing their language, imaginary play and their early mark-making as they moved towards writing.

The staff of the nursery reported that, following its focus on developing boys' language skills, their communication, language and literacy scores improved to match that of the girls.

78. Underpinning the success of the most effective primary schools in literacy was their rigorous approach to teaching reading that included thorough and consistent programmes. Staff saw these highly organised programmes as the core of their school's work in teaching reading and they were closely monitored.

79. In the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, staff regularly taught reading and adults listened to pupils read frequently, often daily. Senior staff recognised the importance of regular reading practice and instruction. Staff understood the different phases of reading development and this understanding was reflected in the resources they used and in how they matched work to pupils' needs at the right level.
80. The following examples show how three successful primary schools established efficient ways to teach early reading.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, pupils followed the Letters and Sounds phonics programme. They were introduced to a popular reading scheme, given reading books and copies of key words to be practised at home. Trained adults listened to children read frequently in school, often daily. This programme was maintained until the pupils attained a reading age of approximately seven years. At this point, normally around Year 1, the pupils were placed into groups, according to their reading ages, for guided reading sessions. Guided reading groups took place two or three times a week. For a small number of pupils who were progressing more slowly than their peers, daily individual reading was maintained.

Arrangements for individual reading ensured that each child read to an adult at least twice a week. This reduced to once a week as children reached the higher levels in upper Key Stage 2 unless they were having difficulties, in which case daily support was provided. The school valued the emotional effect of one-to-one work, particularly for children who might not read with and to adults at home.

The '2.40pm' support system saw teaching assistants leave the afternoon activities and lead shared reading with lower ability readers who had been identified as needing extra support. The children were allocated to specific adults who built positive reading relationships with the pupils. They listened to them read twice a week. This was additional, supplementary support; it did not replace the regular reading that pupils did with their own teachers. Children read from a range of types of text, including those of their own choice.

81. Typically, the schools visited provided experiences beyond those that their pupils would otherwise encounter, specifically to give them something interesting to talk and write about. Literacy was often a strong focus for lessons in subjects other than in English and practising key skills was integrated within all subjects. Debating, speaking publicly, acting in plays and reading to an audience all featured regularly in the curriculum of the most successful schools.

Teachers successfully exploited opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy skills.

82. Six of the 17 secondary schools visited in the second year of the survey had developed a primary-style curriculum in Year 7, where the same teacher taught students in more than one subject and they moved less between classes. Inspectors saw some good practice in these lessons. The headteachers and senior staff were able to show evidence of better progress for Year 7 students in English than in previous years. However, as these were recent initiatives, there was no longitudinal evidence of the longer-term impact on outcomes for the schools' most vulnerable students.
83. All the secondary schools visited used the 14–19 curriculum well to re-engage students in literacy by making strong links to vocational studies. This was successful in that students were gaining a qualification in functional English and were positive about their experience in school. The schools had improved the proportion of their students gaining A\* to G at GCSE. However, the proportion gaining A\* to C including English and mathematics at GCSE was above the national average in only three of the 17 schools serving the more disadvantaged socio-economic areas in the second year of the survey. What lay behind the success of these three schools were the setting of high targets and their exceptionally high aspirations for students' attainment in English.
84. In the adult literacy sessions seen, tutors routinely referred to parts of speech and punctuation, familiarising learners with terminology and conventions that had confused them in the past. A common feature of successful practice was the efforts that tutors made to contextualise reading and writing tasks. Tutors grounded their examples well in their learners' experiences, as in this example.

In a session for adult learners focused on adjectives, the tutor explained their meaning and function by linking them to objects the learners were very familiar with, such as aluminium foil and mints. She encouraged the learners to find words to describe them such as 'shiny foil' and 'cool mints'. By the end of the session, learners were using adjectives with some confidence in speaking and writing and could say which words were adjectives rather than nouns.

85. Contextualisation was particularly strong for the learners who were following vocational courses. In a further education college, for instance, students on a health and social care course used a National Health Service update on swine flu in an exercise on commas. In another example, a session in a college's training restaurant for entry level learners with learning difficulties combined the development of vocational and literacy skills effectively.

One of the learners typed out the lunchtime menu for the public on a computer, referring to pictures to reinforce his understanding of the words

he needed and using the spell-check facility to ensure that he spelled the words correctly. He explained that he was getting quicker at doing this and was now able to recognise more often the words that he came across in catering such as 'lamb', 'beef', 'pork', 'salad', 'bread', 'drinks'. A second learner was writing out the special dishes of the day on a blackboard, helped by pictures of the dishes with their names printed underneath. She started off with writing that was too small, but when the tutor pointed out that customers coming in needed to be able to read it, she recast the list. The real context greatly helped her understanding of the relevance of the work she was doing in literacy.

86. In sessions involving writing for specific purposes, tutors gave careful consideration to designing tasks that were likely to be of immediate practical relevance to their learners. For example, a family learning session in a college focused on letter writing, as the learners were mainly soldiers who were to be posted overseas.

### Meeting individual needs

87. Leaders and managers of all the early years registered providers, schools and post-16 providers visited planned to meet children and learners' individual literacy needs.
88. In the most effective primary schools in the survey, tasks set by teachers matched pupils' needs and abilities well. In Key Stage 1, staff frequently grouped pupils for activities by their levels of attainment in phonics, reading and writing.
89. All the schools in the survey made provision for small groups or individual pupils who had difficulties with literacy. The range of interventions and support provided were most successful when they linked closely to pupils' previous learning in lessons. For example, in an outstanding primary school, a Year 5 pupil taking part in an intervention programme used her knowledge and understanding well in a subsequent English lesson. She explained her progress to the inspector.

'In my Wave 3 group [the intervention group], I have a list of words that I have learnt how to spell. They are my "non-negotiable" spellings. If I spell one of those wrong in my work, I get cross with myself and my teacher puts a red line underneath it because I know how to spell it. With new words I am learning, I practise 'Look, cover, write, check' three times, but my teacher writes those out in the margin so that I can check my spelling. Once I can spell them, my teacher and I put them on the list. My teacher says I should always try to segment new words to spell like I do in my intervention sessions. He knows all the words I should know because my

support teacher gives him a list which he checks with me. I have really improved my spelling this year.'

90. The more effective secondary schools in the survey had put in place a range of support for pupils in need of intensive help with reading and writing. This support included:

- providing individual Reading Recovery programmes for pupils with very low reading ages (defined as a reading age of seven or lower); typically, three hours of support each week
- ensuring that pupils who were learning English as an additional language received support that focused on their particular needs
- providing the English department with teaching assistants who had a full-time commitment to it
- establishing additional reading programmes, sometimes with the help of volunteers
- introducing lessons on phonics for Year 7 pupils with low reading ages (defined as pupils with a reading age below nine years)
- establishing a mentoring programme for the more vulnerable pupils to ensure that they attended school and English lessons regularly.

91. The following case study illustrates how a secondary school set about improving students' reading successfully.

Leaders chose a programme based on the simple principle of reading a book and then answering quiz questions on it. Students did the quizzes online and tutors could monitor the students' achievements through a variety of reports. The school trialled the programme with a small number of students. The analysis of data and interviews with students revealed that the group made good gains in improving their reading, as measured by their reading ages and by National Curriculum levels in English. It was also clear that the initiative increased the students' motivation to read a range of books. The school therefore expanded the programme to nearly all the students in Key Stage 3. Its records showed that from September 2008 to June 2009, all the year groups made at least good progress. Students are now able to have access at home to the online assessments. The school believes that this has contributed strongly to the students' independent learning.

92. Another highly successful secondary school raised standards in reading by having a designated weekly reading session for the whole school.

All the staff and students worked in small groups of similar ability to read a book selected by the group. They read the book out loud in the session

and discussed it. Less academically able groups worked with a tutor who had a good understanding of particular learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, and how to develop reading skills. All the students knew their reading ages and students told inspectors that improving them was an incentive. The school's data demonstrated outstanding progress, particularly for some of the less academically able students.

93. In the provision for adults, discrete literacy classes were small, often with fewer than 10 learners. Learners contrasted this favourably with their experience at school. Tutors had a good knowledge of learners' particular needs and they took advantage of the small classes to provide regular and effective attention to individuals. At its simplest level, in a college literacy class, the tutor ensured that a learner with hearing impairment was best positioned so that he could hear her and the other learners clearly. At an independent work-based learning provider, a tutor worked productively with one learner over some months, ensuring that the timing of the session, its content and form closely matched the learner's needs.

The tutor was very aware of the learner's individual needs. He was a rail worker in his 50s who, having successfully hidden his illiteracy to date, now needed to pass examinations at work. The learner lived a long way from the provider, so classes were scheduled flexibly, for two-hour sessions fortnightly. A detailed assessment of his needs showed he had difficulties with auditory processing and so the tutor's approaches were mainly visual. Plans had clear, detailed objectives. The tutor consistently used very effective questions to help the learner grasp, for example, why punctuation was required, how it helped readers and how he could apply his new knowledge and skill to further his writing.

After using only capital letters for over 50 years, he is now using small letters as well. He has recently written his wife a Christmas card for the first time. Since starting his studies, he has already passed an examination at work.

94. In all the adult providers visited, inspectors met learners with dyslexia. In most cases, learners said that the school they had attended had not identified the problem. In seven of the providers, tutors were providing specific support for learners with dyslexia. This included using coloured overlays, one-to-one specialist teaching and regular screening. In one further education college, 70% of the learners showed dyslexic tendencies in the screening tests conducted at entry. The learners interviewed by the inspectors felt their reading difficulties linked directly with their schools' approach to teaching reading at the early stages.
95. In the most successful schools visited, staff typically talked about the 'relentless efforts' they made to match provision to need. The headteachers were highly



effective at analysing the impact of their school's work and acted swiftly to tackle any weaknesses, as illustrated here.

The headteacher of an outstanding primary school in an area of high social and economic deprivation insisted on developing consistent practice in teaching spelling. The outcome was staff that knew exactly how to achieve high standards. In planning lessons, they had to explain, for instance, how they intended to teach basic spelling skills and not just list the words pupils had to learn. Monitoring included more than lesson observations and the scrutiny of data. Attention to detail meant that literacy subject leaders were able to identify staff who, in this example, were unsure how to teach children to spell. These staff were given individual support, including opportunities to observe outstanding teachers and time for discussion and debate with literacy experts about the most effective methods of teaching spelling. The outcome of this cycle of support was outstanding practice in teaching spelling and pupils' high attainment.

96. As a result of monitoring, the most successful secondary schools visited had made incremental changes to meet individuals' needs more effectively. These changes included the following:
- increasing the number of lessons of English in Key Stage 3; seven schools ensured daily short periods
  - introducing additional dedicated library lessons or reading time
  - establishing identified literacy time, as distinct from English, to teach core skills, often with students grouped by ability
  - ensuring that all Year 7 students had a reading book and that personal reading took place at specified times, for example, at tutor time
  - developing robust assessment, identifying students' progress in reading, writing and spelling
  - ensuring that teachers in all faculties included objectives for literacy in their lesson plans.

## Resources for literacy

97. All the early years registered providers visited organised their environments well for literacy. Staff labelled resources clearly with pictures and words to help children to make choices. Different areas of a room had clear functions. For example, staff grouped writing and drawing materials together in one place. This encouraged children who were interested in the activities to join in and choose their own materials. Outdoor areas were well-designed to encourage boys in particular.

98. All the childminders visited made excellent use of their local environment, such as acting out familiar stories on walks or making marks in mud and on the beach with sticks. One very effective childminder took children on a night walk to develop their listening skills, toasting marshmallows on a campfire. These experiences extended children's vocabulary and made them excited and eager to talk. One child reported:

'I had a torch and I found some logs. I was running really fast. We had a story. The owl was funny. I saw stars. I think I like the dark.'

99. Many of the successful primary schools visited highlighted their work in the Early Years Foundation Stage as critical to their success in extending children's vocabulary. In these schools, resources that parents could use at home to develop language and communication skills with their children were popular.

100. The primary and secondary schools visited emphasised the school library as contributing markedly to improving literacy skills. All the schools visited had well-resourced libraries, often with computerised loan systems and facilities for accessing learning resources on an intranet. Libraries in the secondary schools were often open for much longer than the school day. This enabled students to complete their homework on the school's computers before and after school. The enthusiasm and responsiveness of the librarian generally had a direct impact on the attitudes of the students towards the library and reading.

101. Interactive whiteboards and computers were used excellently in many of the lessons seen. In the best lessons, video technology introduced pupils to new ideas effectively and showed how reporters and authors used real life experiences to write their accounts. Pupils in these lessons learnt from the techniques they saw and enriched their writing, as in this example.

In an outstanding lesson in Year 3, the teacher played the pupils a pre-recorded short film that showed her making and writing step-by-step instructions to make a mini volcano erupt. This was made from bicarbonate of soda and vinegar. The pupils had completed this activity themselves in a science lesson earlier in the week. As the pupils watched the film, they noted that she had used the wrong time connectives and that her instructions were in the wrong order. They joyfully pointed out all the mistakes. Later, when they wrote their own instructions, all of them used connectives related to time correctly and wrote their instructions in the correct order.

102. In all the learning and skills providers visited, tutors made excellent use of authentic texts in a wide range of genres. For learners following vocational programmes, materials which reflected the vocational context were particularly motivating. Tutors' own materials, such as flash cards, were effective in helping learners work intensively on sentence building and vocabulary. National Tests

of Literacy practice papers<sup>24</sup> provided learners with examination practice at the appropriate levels and the tutors' own materials, such as flash cards, ensured that learning was at a level appropriate for the learner. Adult learners appreciated the use of digital learning programmes and made extensive use of these, particularly when working independently in the classroom and on vocationally related programmes.

103. Teachers in the secondary schools and providers of post-16 and adult education identified the lack of teaching materials for systematic phonics for older pupils and adults rather than designed for young children. The only scheme being used that inspectors observed during the survey had been designed primarily for prisoner 'mentors' to teach fellow prisoners to read. Although secondary schools and adult providers had some success with this scheme, it was by no means universally suitable.

### **Pastoral care and partnerships**

104. The majority of the primary schools in the survey had forged strong links with parents, seeing parental engagement as central to removing a number of barriers to pupils' progress in literacy. One school's support work focused on three distinct areas:
- the impact of poverty and poor health on learning
  - using family learning to improve parents' knowledge of literacy and their support for their children
  - raising aspirations through encouraging parents to volunteer, providing learning mentors for pupils and in obtaining work placements to support parents back into work and remove families from the cycle of worklessness.
105. An outstanding primary school made excellent use of its onsite children's centre, managed by the school, to develop literacy within the whole family. Its provision included:
- parent/carer and toddler groups
  - family literacy
  - speech therapy
  - literacy for those learning English as an additional language
  - 'story-sack' sessions on Fridays

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<sup>24</sup> The National Tests of Literacy at levels 1 and 2 are the nationally recognised assessments for adult literacy learning. Further information available at <http://rwp.excellencegateway.org.uk/readwriteplus/NationalTestLeaflet>.

- courses on 'Reading with your child'
- a course on starting points for readers
- a set of free books for new families and free membership cards to the children's centre library.

The school also involved the pre-school provision and the nursery in all its literacy policies. The impact of this outstanding partnership work was evident in the higher attainment, as measured by the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, of the children whose families were using the facilities of the children's centre.

106. A nursery in an area of high socio-economic deprivation employed a speech therapist to run a six-week course for parents that gave them 'talking tips'. Staff focused the course on the parents of children with language delay or other speech-related problems. The nursery noticed an improvement in children's language development and a reduction in the proportion of children needing follow-up speech and language therapy.
107. In a high-attaining, inner-city secondary school, effective and focused projects, including work with particular groups of Somali girls and their parents, Bangladeshi girls and their mothers and with Black Caribbean boys, were raising students' aspirations in literacy. The attainment in literacy of students from minority ethnic backgrounds was high and the school also gained a good understanding of its local community through its pastoral work. However, the same school had not attempted similar work with its lowest-attaining group, White British students who were eligible for free school meals. During the survey, inspectors found no examples of any secondary schools that were focusing specifically on engaging the families of White British students where these formed a minority.
108. One of the secondary schools visited used a combination of partnership work and flexible timetabling to particularly good effect to keep vulnerable pupils in full-time education and enable them to make good progress in the core subjects.

On joining the school in Year 7, an academically able girl soon became disruptive and, by Year 9, was considered to be out of control. Support from the behaviour outreach teacher had little effect and the girl's parents rejected other suggested strategies. In her first term of Year 10, the girl was on the verge of being permanently excluded and was interviewed by the governors' pastoral committee. As a result, a personalised timetable was negotiated for her. This included vocational sessions off site and additional support for English, provided by a learning mentor and teachers in the school's inclusion unit. Her behaviour improved, her attendance rose to 97% and she completed Year 10 successfully. At the time of the

inspector's visit, she was predicted to achieve five grades A\* to C at GCSE, including English.

109. Inspectors found outstanding partnership work in seven of the post-16 and adult providers, including links with employers and local communities. In one college, strong links with the Ministry of Defence were enabling the college to focus on providing well for the literacy needs of army recruits and disaffected 14 to 16-year-olds.

## Mentoring

110. Staff in the early years registered providers and schools visited recognised that they needed to provide pastoral advice and support for their children's families. Inspectors found that the most successful providers and schools had established highly effective procedures, teams and individuals to manage this work, enabling teachers to focus on teaching and learning.
111. The importance of continuity of support was highlighted in Ofsted's report on keeping young people in education, employment or training.<sup>25</sup>
112. An outstanding secondary school claimed particular gains from its mentoring programme for students in Year 11. About 80 pupils (30% of the cohort) had mentors, recruited from key adults who worked at every level in the school. Some were support staff and had no trained educational background, but the important requirement was that they could develop a constructive rapport with students. Increasing the involvement of the students' parents was one of the aims of this programme. The school sent regular letters of praise to them, such as: 'It has been noted that G has made significant progress in achieving five A\* to C grades...', but also of criticism: 'It has been brought to my attention that there is a significant decline in N's attitudes'. If the learning mentor had concerns, she or he would have a telephone conversation with the parent. Parents' attendance at parents' meetings to discuss their children's progress increased to 40%, a great improvement from the very low starting point of 5% seven or eight years previously.
113. Another outstanding secondary school held weekly multi-agency meetings to discuss all aspects of students' achievements, focusing on both academic and social and emotional development. The meetings resulted in rapid, targeted support for students. For many of these students, literacy was a particular problem. For instance, the school worked exceptionally well with youth workers to keep a Black Caribbean boy in education. The boy said:

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<sup>25</sup> *Reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training: what works and why* (090236), Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090236](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090236).

'I was lost and on the street most of the time. It was the learning mentor/youth worker who kept me in school. Basically, he thought I could change myself round. He put faith in me. The turning point was when I got involved in street crime and the police charged me. He helped me, gave me advice, but told me that it's me who's got to do it. He said, "Don't tell me what I want to hear, show me what you can do." I did. The teachers were there to help me. Saturday classes, after-school revision classes, they got me through my GCSEs. Basically, I let go of my close friends, because I can't be with them. They had to go. I want to be a youth worker, or teacher, help keep kids like me off the streets. I want to take the burden off them. I want them to know that they can go to university.'

114. Adult learners also appreciated the individual support tutors provided to ease their way into learning.

A young man, aged 24, started literacy learning on probation. He could cope only with one-to-one study because he 'thought the others might think I was thick'. The tutor persuaded him to go to college and join a group. He said, 'Now I see people in their 40s and 50s still learning, not just me. Whatever they can do, I can do; sometimes I'm better, sometimes they are. Teachers must be nice. My teacher talks to you as an adult, looks at you as a normal person'. He enjoyed writing stories – 'I can write them forever' – and learning about grammar, which he found 'interesting'.

## Virtual headteachers

115. Inspectors held discussions with school staff about supporting looked after children with literacy. The schools gave inspectors a considerable range of evidence about the additional pastoral support provided for these pupils. However, the support for them and teaching in literacy did not differ markedly from that provided for most other pupils in the school. In the most effective schools visited, looked after children made the same progress as other pupils. However, as their starting points were frequently below that of other pupils, this performance was not necessarily a reflection of their true potential.
116. Headteachers highlighted the national focus on the attainment of looked after children as having a positive impact, commenting that reporting to the Department for Education on the progress of looked after children was ensuring a closer focus on this group.

117. The two virtual headteachers<sup>26</sup> with whom discussions were held during the survey were keen to gain accurate data on the progress of pupils who were looked after. However, up to date assessment information was often missing: looked after children were moved frequently and there was often a gap before a pupil's new school or local authority received information. At a national event for virtual headteachers, attended by inspectors, these views were expressed by all the 100 or so virtual headteachers who attended.
118. Feedback to virtual headteachers from looked after children about a national scheme to increase their interest in reading by regularly posting books to individuals at home was highly positive.<sup>27</sup> Both the local authorities visited noted improvements in reading at Key Stage 2 for the looked after children, as measured by standardised reading scores. The schools appreciated the additional funding they had received for computers and highlighted the success of pupils who were receiving one-to-one tuition to improve their standards in reading.<sup>28</sup>
119. The importance of an adult mentor was critical to ensuring the pupils' success. The looked after children with whom inspectors held discussions felt that their mentors made a marked difference to their attitudes towards school.
120. Ofsted's report, *Moving through the system*, supports this survey's findings that support for looked after children was most effective when specific responsibility was taken, by a local authority officer or a headteacher, for monitoring their academic progress.<sup>29</sup>

## Notes

The aim of the survey was to illustrate effective approaches to literacy that might help others to improve their practice.

Inspectors visited 30 early years registered providers, 53 schools and 25 colleges and other providers of adult education and training in the first year of the survey and 15

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<sup>26</sup> The Green Paper, *Care matters*, proposed that there should be a 'virtual headteacher' in every local area to oversee the education of looked after children and those placed outside the authority, to take responsibility as if she or he were the headteacher of a single school; *Care matters: transforming the lives of children and young people in care* (Cm 6932), DCSF, 2006; <http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=CM+6932&>

<sup>27</sup> The Letterbox Club is a national initiative to send books to children aged 7–13 who are in foster care. For further information, see: [www.letterboxclub.org.uk/Home](http://www.letterboxclub.org.uk/Home).

<sup>28</sup> The One to One Tuition Programme is a Government-funded initiative to help children gain more confidence and understanding in English and mathematics. For further information, see: [www.tda.gov.uk/teacher/developing-career/one-to-one-tuition.aspx](http://www.tda.gov.uk/teacher/developing-career/one-to-one-tuition.aspx).

<sup>29</sup> *Moving through the system – information, advice and guidance* (080273), Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080273](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080273).

early years registered providers, 45 schools and 22 colleges and other providers of adult education and training in the second year. The selection of providers was based on inspection evidence and data on achievement and attainment which showed that the providers were particularly successful in enabling their learners (aged from three to adult) to make better than average progress and to achieve at least average standards of literacy.

The majority of those visited in the survey were in areas of high deprivation. The providers not in areas of high socio-economic need were chosen either because of their exceptional work in developing communication, language and literacy, or because they were supporting looked after children, who were of particular interest to the survey, or for both of these reasons.

In selecting the schools during the second year of the survey, inspectors considered data on pupils who were known to be eligible for free school meals in England. They visited the schools where this group of pupils was achieving above the national average for all pupils and attaining above the national average for similar groups. All but two of the settings and schools visited had been judged good or outstanding at their most recent institutional inspection. The remaining two schools were satisfactory overall, but had particular strengths in literacy.

For the colleges and other providers of adult education and training visited, inspectors selected those where their most recent inspection report suggested inspectors might find good practice in literacy. Much of this provision was in areas of deprivation. Many of the adult learners came from groups traditionally under-represented in learning, such as the long-term unemployed, offenders and ex-offenders.

In all the providers visited, inspectors observed lessons and scrutinised documentation relating to the curriculum for literacy and the standards achieved by learners. They held discussions with learners and staff and, where relevant, also with parents and governors. Inspectors attended a national meeting for virtual headteachers and scrutinised the work of two local authority officers responsible for provision for children in public care.

## **Further information**

### **Publications by Ofsted**

*Framework for the inspection of maintained schools in England from September 2009* (090019), Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090019](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090019).



*Moving through the system – information, advice and guidance* (080273) Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080273](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080273).

*Reading by six: how the best schools do it* (100197), Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100197](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100197).

*Reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training: what works and why* (090236) Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090236](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090236).

*Responding to the Rose Review: schools' approaches to the systematic teaching of phonics* (080038), Ofsted, 2008; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080038](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080038).

*The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2008–2009* (HC 11), TSO, 2009; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Annual-Report-2008-09](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Annual-Report-2008-09).

*The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2009–2010* (HC 559), TSO, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Annual-Report-2009-10](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Annual-Report-2009-10).

*Twenty outstanding primary schools – Excelling against the odds* (090170), Ofsted 2009; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090170](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090170).

*Twelve outstanding secondary schools – Excelling against the odds* (080240) Ofsted 2009; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080240](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080240).

*White boys from low-income backgrounds: good practice in schools* (070220), Ofsted, 2009; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070220](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070220).

## Other publications

*Skills for life – changing lives*, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, 2009; <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=247635>

*The Skills for Life Survey: a national needs and impacts survey of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, Research report 490*, Department for Education and Skills, 2003; <http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=RB490&>

*Every Child a Talker – guidance for early language lead practitioners* (00854-2008DOM-EN), DfES, 2008; <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/153355>

*Letters and sounds: Principles and practice of high quality phonics* (00281-2007-FLR-EN), DCSF, 2007; <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/84969>

J Rose, *Independent review of the teaching of early reading* (0201-2006DOC-EN), DfES, 2006;

<http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFES-0201-2006>.

*Care Matters: Transforming the lives of children and young people in care* (03979-2006BKT), DfES, 2006;

<http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=CM+6932&>

## Annex: Providers visited

### Providers visited in the first year

#### Childminders

1	Buckinghamshire
2	Hampshire
2	Northamptonshire
2	Oxfordshire
1	Surrey
1	Warwickshire
1	Wiltshire

#### Local authority

#### Childcare on non-domestic premises

Angels at Play	Hertfordshire
Anglesey Pre-School Playgroup	Birmingham
Acorns Under Fives	Leicestershire
Butterfly Nursery	Southwark
Checkendon Pre-school Playgroup	Berkshire
Cropredy Playgroup	Oxfordshire
Donnington Playgroup	Oxfordshire
Eaton Mill Nursery	Buckinghamshire
Fordfield House Nursery Limited	Bedfordshire
Jack and Jill Pre-school	Oxfordshire
King's Kids Pre-school	Oxfordshire
Little Orchard Pre-school	Wiltshire
Surestart Lime Tree Children's Centre	Birmingham
Little Shipmates Day Nursery	Hampshire
The Phoenix School	Bedfordshire
Playdays Playgroup	Sunderland
St Monica Nursery	Lambeth
Somerset Road Playgroup	Southampton
Sunny Days Pre-school (Malmesbury)	Wiltshire
Whizz Kids Childcare	South Tyneside

#### Local authority

### Primary schools

Abbey Hulton Primary School  
 Arnside National CofE School  
 Aycliffe Drive Primary School  
 Bedford Primary School  
 Bellenden Primary School  
 Brandwood Primary School  
 Bromet Primary School  
 Cadland Primary School  
 Chilcote Primary School  
 Christ Church Church of England  
 Controlled Primary School  
 Christ the King Catholic Primary School  
 Corby Kingswood Primary School  
 Durand Primary School  
 Eliot Bank Primary School  
 Friars Primary Foundation School  
 Goldstone Primary School  
 Great Dalby School  
 Holbeach Primary School  
 Lawns Park Primary School  
 Lucas Vale Primary School  
 Our Lady and St Werburgh's Catholic  
 Primary School  
 Preston St Matthew's Church of England  
 Primary School  
 Riverside Primary School  
 Sherington Primary School  
 Signhills Junior School  
 St Elizabeth Catholic Primary School  
 St Francis of Assisi Catholic Primary  
 School  
 St John Fisher Catholic Primary School  
 St Mary's Catholic Primary School,  
 Maidenhead

### Local authority

Stoke-on-Trent  
 Cumbria  
 Hertfordshire  
 Sefton  
 Southwark  
 Bolton  
 Hertfordshire  
 Hampshire  
 Birmingham  
 Sefton  
 Wirral  
 Northamptonshire  
 Lambeth  
 Lewisham  
 Southwark  
 Brighton and Hove  
 Leicestershire  
 Lewisham  
 Leeds  
 Lewisham  
 Staffordshire  
 Lancashire  
 Southwark  
 Greenwich  
 North East Lincolnshire  
 Tower Hamlets  
 Leeds  
 Sheffield  
 Windsor and Maidenhead

St Mary's Catholic School, Penzance	Cornwall
Weston Coyney Junior School	Stoke-on-Trent
Whalley Church of England Primary School	Lancashire
Whitehouse Common Primary School	Birmingham

### **Secondary schools**

Archbishop Ilsley Catholic School
Aston Manor School
Brampton Manor School
Handsworth Wood Girls' Visual and Performing Arts Specialist College and Sixth Form Centre
Hurworth School
King David High School
Litherland High School
Loxford School of Science and Technology
Middleton Technology School
Morpeth School
Oakgrove School
Penwortham Girls' High School
Ridgeway High School
Robert Bloomfield Middle School
Saint Michael's Catholic High School
Sir John Lawes School
St Augustine's Catholic College
Stockwell Park School
The Thomas Hardy School
Woodchurch High School Engineering College

### **Local authority**

Birmingham
Birmingham
Newham
Birmingham
Darlington
Liverpool
Sefton
Redbridge
Rochdale
Tower Hamlets
Milton Keynes
Lancashire
Wirral
Bedfordshire
Hertfordshire
Hertfordshire
Wiltshire
Lambeth
Dorset
Wirral

### **Colleges of further education**

Amersham and Wycombe College	Buckinghamshire
The College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London	Haringey

Ealing, Hammersmith & West London College	Hammersmith & Fulham
Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education	Grimsby
Highbury College	Portsmouth
Nelson & Colne College	Nelson
Runshaw College	Leyland
Solihull College	Solihull
Stockport College	Stockport
Wigan and Leigh College	Wigan

### **Training providers**

Action Training (Stoke) Ltd	Stoke-on-Trent
AWE Plc	Reading
Blackwater Training Ltd (Southend-on-Sea)	Southend-on-Sea
Chinese Centre (North of England)	Newcastle upon Tyne
Chulmleigh Business & Enterprise Centre	Chulmleigh
Hill Holt Wood	Norton Disney
JHP Training	Coventry
KTS Training Ltd	Bristol
Manchester Training Limited	Manchester
North Wessex Training	Devizes
Training Plus Merseyside Ltd	Liverpool
Zenos Limited	Banbury

### **Adult and community learning providers**

Leicester City Council	Leicester
Northern College for Residential Adult Education Limited	Barnsley
The Working Men's College	Camden

## Providers visited in the second year

### Childminders

2

### Local authority

Cornwall

### Childcare on non-domestic premises

### Local authority

Bidston & St James Children's Centre –  
Miriam Place Nursery

Wirral

Camborne Nursery School and Family  
Services

Cornwall

Lisson Green Community Nursery

Westminster

Little Cherub

Wirral

Once Upon a Time

Hillingdon

Orchard Nursery School

Gloucestershire

Oxford Brookes University Nursery

Oxfordshire

Redland Nursery

Wiltshire

Smiley Face Nursery

Wiltshire

The Sunshine Centre

Oxfordshire

Tiny Happy People Pre School Nursery

City of Bristol

Wanborough Playgroup

Swindon

Widcombe Acorns Pre-School

Bath and North East Somerset

### Primary schools

### Local authority

Ash Green Community Primary School

Calderdale

Beech Hill Primary School

Newcastle upon Tyne

Berrymede Junior School

Ealing

Bonner Primary School

Tower Hamlets

Bradwell County Primary School

Staffordshire

Christchurch Primary School

Redbridge

Crescent Primary School

Stoke-on-Trent

Cubitt Town Junior School

Tower Hamlets

Gateway Primary School

Westminster

Greasby Junior School

Wirral

Heronsgate Primary School

Greenwich

Ilfracombe Church of England Junior School	Devon
Lily Lane Junior School	Manchester
Mauldeth Road Primary School	Manchester
Nelson Mandela School	Birmingham
Old Ford Primary School	Tower Hamlets
Richmond Primary School	Oldham
St Christopher's Catholic Primary School	Liverpool
St James' Church of England Primary School	Southwark
St Laurence's Catholic Primary School	Knowsley
Taylor Road Primary School	Leicester
Temple Primary School	Manchester
The Clara Grant Primary School	Tower Hamlets
Thornton Primary School	Birmingham
Tollgate Primary School	Newham
Watling Street Primary School	Walsall
Woodlands Community Primary School	Lancashire
Woodside Community School and Children's Centre	Dudley

### **Secondary schools**

Bartley Green School A Specialist Technology and Sports College	Birmingham
Bishop Challoner Catholic Collegiate Boys School	Tower Hamlets
Colne Primet High School	Lancashire
Drayton Manor High School	Ealing
Ernest Bevin College	Wandsworth
Featherstone High School	Ealing
Holland Park School	Kensington and Chelsea
Hollingworth Business and Enterprise College	Rochdale
Kenton School	Newcastle upon Tyne
Langdon Park Community School	Tower Hamlets
Macmillan Academy	Middlesbrough

### **Local authority**



Oaklands School	Tower Hamlets
Quintin Kynaston School	Westminster
Sandhill View School	Sunderland
Sidney Stringer School – Specialising in Mathematics and Computing	Coventry
Stepney Green Mathematics and Computing College	Tower Hamlets
Treviglas Community College	Cornwall

### **Colleges of further education**

Accrington and Rossendale College	Accrington
Bedford College	Bedford
Burnley College	Burnley
Darlington College	Darlington
East Berkshire College	Langley
Liverpool Community College	Liverpool
Newham College of Further Education	Newham
South Devon College	Paignton
Trafford College	Trafford

### **Independent specialist colleges**

Derwen College	Shropshire
The Fortune Centre of Riding Therapy	Christchurch

### **Training providers**

Aurelia Training Limited	Coventry
Four Counties Training Ltd	London
SMART Training	Kingston upon Thames
Venture Learning Ltd	Wigan

### **Adult and community learning providers**

Manchester Adult Education Service	Manchester
Morley College	Lambeth
Nottingham City Council	Nottingham

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council

Oldham

Westminster Adult Education Service

Westminster

**Prisons and young offenders  
institutions**

HMYOI Castington

Morpeth

HMP Dorchester

Dorchester