

THE **SECONDARY** LITERACY RESEARCH AND POLICY GUIDE **2017/2018**



The gateway to good practice

The *Secondary Literacy Research and Policy Guide* is a yearly summary of recent research and policy developments in English and whole-school literacy that is designed to support busy practitioners in building evidence-based practice.

The annual literacy toolkit:

The *Literacy Research and Policy Guide* sits alongside our **Annual Literacy School Review** and our Annual Literacy Pupil Survey to provide a comprehensive suite of materials to support evaluation, reflection and ongoing strategic development of whole-school literacy. Updated every year, these three essential publications can be built into your annual school-improvement cycle to provide a gateway to practice that is informed by evidence, in line with policy and inspired by practical ideas.

The Annual Literacy School Review REFLECTION

- ❑ A practical set of easy-to-use audit posters to support whole-school discussion, reflection and target areas for development over the year
- ❑ Advice and practical resources linked to each poster to support and develop good practice
- ❑ Primary and secondary versions available

The Annual Literacy Pupil Survey ANALYSIS

- ❑ Reports and insights from our unique yearly national survey to track pupil attitudes and behaviours towards reading, writing, spoken language and technology to help map trends and inform practice
- ❑ Your own survey. Sign your school up to be part of the annual literacy pupil survey and receive your own individual school report to build practice based on analysis and evidence

The Literacy Research and Policy Guide RESEARCH

- ❑ Your yearly guide to new research and policy from the literacy sector to help keep you up to date and informed
- ❑ Useful summary and headline pointers to support busy practitioners in accessing and disseminating key recent literacy research – the gateway to good practice
- ❑ Primary and secondary versions available

Developing practice

Raising standards

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Introduction

“Teachers should develop pupils’ spoken language, reading, writing and vocabulary as integral aspects of the teaching of every subject. English is both a subject in its own right and the medium for teaching; for pupils, understanding the language provides access to the whole curriculum. Fluency in the English language is an essential foundation for success in all subjects” (DfE, 2014, p.10)

The development of language and literacy in the national curriculum remains central; as the above statement shows, these skills provide ‘access to’ and a ‘foundation for success’ in school. It is more than success in school though. According to the OECD, “adults with good literacy skills (the equivalent of a good English Language GCSE or better) are much more likely to be in work than those with lower levels of literacy: 83% compared to 55%” (DfE, 2015, page 7). The same report shows that literacy skills also have a strong impact on wider social outcomes. For example, “adults in England with low literacy levels have twice the odds of reporting low levels of trust as their peers with high literacy, and three times the odds of reporting poor health” (DfE, 2015, page 7). Without strong literacy skills, a young person’s life chances are severely diminished; their employability, health, confidence and happiness are all compromised.

The link between literacy and life chances has never been as widely researched and recognised as it is now. It is for this reason that the current government is concerned about adult literacy levels as well as how many pupils are achieving the equivalent of a good English Language GCSE in England. According to the National Literacy Trust’s report, *Literacy: State of a Nation* (2012), around 16%, or 5.2 million adults in England, can be described as ‘functionally illiterate’. They would not pass an English GCSE and have literacy levels at or below those expected of an 11-year-old. In addition, the 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows that 17% of England’s 15-year-olds did not achieve the minimum level of proficiency in literacy, and that the gap between our highest and lowest performers is significantly above average. According to the International Survey of Adult Skills (OECD, 2012), the UK is the only OECD country where young adults do not have better literacy skills than those nearing retirement. It seems that further work is necessary to secure universally high standards of literacy.

Some might say that the government’s strategy (through a focus on systematic phonics teaching and pupil premium funding) has been a success with the percentage of pupils achieving an A* to C in GCSE English increasing gradually in recent years. However, these GCSE results still mean that more than 25% of pupils failed to achieve basic literacy levels in 2016.

As a result, literacy remains at the heart of the latest policy documents and Ofsted’s framework for inspection (in both schools and ITE). These insist that every school needs a whole-school literacy policy which is implemented systematically across the curriculum; that all teachers view themselves as teachers of literacy and language, regardless of their subject specialism; and that all schools must do everything possible to ensure pupils can read. The government launched a new action plan on reading in 2015, *Reading: the next steps – Supporting higher standards in schools* (2015, March). It outlines the evidence on the importance of reading attainment, progress on reading in recent years and the next steps.

The Secondary Literacy Research and Policy Guide 2017/2018 aims to support you to interpret recent policy changes and important research in key areas of literacy. It should be used in tandem with the secondary **Annual Literacy School Review** posters and advice. This guide focuses on policy and research, while the Annual Literacy School Review gives further explanations about the links and the practical applications of policy.

The first section, ‘Leading literacy across the school’, sets the context and brings everything together to support literacy leaders and coordinators to ensure consistency in their approach to literacy across the whole school. The following sections focus on reading, writing and spoken language and should inform leaders and teachers about what to highlight when seeking to embed literacy across their school. All sections include an updated list of key policy documents which schools should bring their own policy ‘in line’ with during 2017-18, and a summary of the key research which should ‘inform’ practices. In both these areas, there are signposts to some of the National

Literacy Trust membership content that teachers can use to support their work. Further links to resources and content can be found in the secondary Annual Literacy School Review that complements this guide.

As your school develops its literacy practices, we would encourage you to share them with us through case studies or showcases at our regional meetings. With less state guidance and greater school freedoms, sharing evidence-based practice has never been so important.

"Literacy includes the key skills of reading, writing and oral communication that enable pupils to access different areas of the curriculum"

Ofsted, January 2015, page 18

"Teachers have the opportunity to become an evidence based profession, in just one generation: embedding research into everyday practice; making informed decisions independently; and fighting off the odd spectacle of governments telling teachers how to teach, because teachers can use the good quality evidence that they have helped to create, to make their own informed judgements."

Goldacre, 2013

Section 1: Leading literacy across the school

International benchmarks demonstrate that standards in literacy in England are behind many of our international competitors. As a result, the government is prioritising raising standards of literacy in schools. It has updated its policies to keep leadership of literacy at the heart of school improvement.

In line with policy

Ofsted (2015), *KS3: the wasted years?*

Inspection evidence highlights weaknesses in Key Stage 3 and that it is not a high priority for many secondary school leaders in timetabling, assessment and monitoring pupils' progress. Many secondary schools do not build sufficiently on pupils' prior learning at primary school. Pupil responses indicate that repeating work is sometimes an issue in English. In addition, some school leaders are not using the pupil premium funding effectively to close gaps quickly in Key Stage 3.

Ofsted (2015), *School inspection handbook*

"Inspectors will consider the impact of teaching literacy and the outcomes across the range of the school's provision... Inspectors will consider the extent to which the school intervenes to provide support for improving pupils' literacy, especially those pupils at risk of underachieving."

To be judged as outstanding, there must be "excellent practice that ensures all pupils have high levels of literacy... appropriate to their age" and that "Excellent policies underpin practice that ensures pupils... are making excellent progress in literacy." Leadership must tackle poor literacy urgently to ensure pupils' progress.

Ofsted (2015), *Initial teacher education inspection handbook*

Schools involved in ITE partnerships should ensure their training equips trainees with the necessary literacy pedagogy to "develop the literacy (reading, writing and communication) ... skills of their... pupils... and understand the causes" (p.38).

DfE (2014), *The national curriculum in England: Key Stages 3 and 4 framework document*

"Teachers should develop pupils' spoken language, reading, writing and vocabulary as integral aspects of the teaching of every subject. English is both a subject in its own right and the medium for teaching all subjects" (p.10).

DfE (2011), *Teachers' standards: guidance for school leaders, school staff & governing Bodies*

"Teachers must demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulation and the correct use of standard English, whatever their specialist subject" (p.11).

Informed by research

National Literacy Trust (2016) *Teachers and literacy: their perceptions, understanding, confidence and awareness*

2,326 teachers from 112 schools in the UK participated in the National Literacy Trust's literacy survey in January/February 2015. This report presents information on how they feel about teaching literacy, who they believe are responsible for literacy in the school setting, their perceptions of what influences pupils' literacy attainment and of their pupils' literacy. It also focuses on teachers' confidence teaching literacy, their own reading habits and the teaching resources that they like to draw on. Finally, it outlines information on teachers' perceptions of school provisions and reading for enjoyment in schools.

Ofsted (2014), *Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on. Evidence report*

This report focuses on the unseen children and young people who underachieve. It states that 'parenting style' can account for 21% of the gap in literacy and 33% of the gap in language between low-income children and their better-off peers (p.42). Three case studies about how to reduce the gap focus on: meeting the needs of pupils

through one-to-one tuition and mentoring (p.32); working with parents (p.35); and the use of on-going assessment (p.44).

Ofsted (2013a), *Improving literacy in secondary schools: a shared responsibility*

This report summarises what works best to improve literacy across the curriculum and tackle weaknesses in pupils' literacy through seven secondary school case studies. While literacy includes speaking and listening, reading and writing, it should not be limited to these aspects. It should be seen as a set of broader skills where pupils are ready "to engage with challenging concepts, to make constructive connections between subjects, and to learn from the thinking and experience of others" in cross-curricular links between subjects (p.5).

It concludes with 10 principles of best practice, stating there is "no single right way to get it right" to improve literacy (p.6).

The report also states that all schools need to make the case for literacy to their staff. It criticises the 'diminished view' of what literacy encompasses and calls for schools to take on a wider view of literacy that underpins their teaching and learning policies. It prompts schools to draw on the good practice shared in the report, but not to try to transplant the initiative unchanged (p.41).

Barton, G. (2013), *Don't call it literacy! What every teacher needs to know about speaking, listening, reading and writing*

The former headteacher of King Edward VI School in Suffolk and author of this book takes the view that literacy is good teaching and learning. His book gives practical and relevant strategies for schools.

Ofsted (2012), *Moving English forward*

This document calls for all teachers to understand how improved reading, writing and oracy skills would help their pupils make more progress in their own subject (p.54).

Key messages

Literacy essentials

- Successful literacy essentials include: a senior member of staff with knowledge of literacy and pedagogy (a Literacy Leader); effective literacy assessment systems that set targets from national data and not pupil group data; a quality intervention programme; literacy taught within a meaningful and relevant curriculum; at-risk students having a nominated learning mentor; learners being treated as adults; and good partnerships with parents
- A Literacy Leader's key role is to drive progress and ensure that attainment is not restricted by pupils' inability to read and write fluently. The school must help those who have fallen behind to make sustained progress in their reading, as this will affect their writing, confidence and behaviour in every subject
- The school should sign up and take part in the Annual Literacy Pupil Survey to give them a detailed picture of their pupils' attitudes to reading
- Literacy Leaders should use the Annual Literacy School Review, which gives a comprehensive set of actions for schools in improving literacy, along with examples of good practice

Literacy should be woven into the fabric of school life and involve all staff

- It is essential that whole-school literacy is a permanent and visible fixture around the school, and that all members of staff understand its importance
- Ofsted (2013a) states that schools must "make the case for literacy in all subjects and answer the question for teachers, 'What's in it for us?'" (p.5). Some schools have done this by referring to literacy as the 'Language of Learning' (pp.38-39) and clarifying its relationship to effective teaching in all subjects
- Literacy should be regularly featured on the teaching, learning and curriculum agendas and as a performance-management target for teachers. A one-off training day for staff or a display of key words around the school are

only starting points

- All subjects (and the whole school community) should embed literacy in development plans. Senior staff must be involved in delivering key projects; there should be strong links between school and home; the library and the librarian should be central; and, most importantly, students should be actively involved in their literacy initiatives
- In developing classroom practice, schools should make effective use of the specialist knowledge of the literacy coordinator to support individual departments. Staff should be encouraged to identify effective practice in other areas of the curriculum and to learn from each other, with an emphasis on practical ideas that teachers can use in longer-term plans and schemes of work