


A Joint Report by the
Education and Training
Inspectorate and the
Department of Education and
Skills Inspectorate on How
Best to Promote and Improve
Literacy and Numeracy in
our Schools

December 2010

Foreword

This report builds upon important collaborative work involving the Education and Training Inspectorate and the Department for Education and Skills Inspectorate over many years.

The recent work on Literacy and Numeracy is of major importance to both jurisdictions on the island given the realisation that a good quality of teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy is fundamental to the success of the learner in all areas of learning.

The fact that each of the authors of this report had the opportunity, as part of the North-South Inspector Exchange programme, to work alongside their counterpart in the other jurisdiction strengthens the basis for this work.

We welcome this publication and commend it to all with an interest in education but especially to those whose work relates to the promotion of high standards of literacy and numeracy. In doing so, we wish to extend our gratitude to the inspectors, from both Inspectorates who compiled this report, namely: Elizabeth Armour and Nick Todd (ETI) and Eileen O'Sullivan and Máire Uí Shé (DES Inspectorate).



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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and the Department of Education and Skills (DES) Inspectorate have researched and reported on good practice in literacy and numeracy in schools, to help other schools identify good practice and highlight the key features of successful teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy.

With the reconvening of The North/South Ministerial Council in 2008 following the restoration of devolution, a number of cross-border initiatives and working groups have been established. Subsequently, the North/South Literacy and Numeracy Working Group, working under the auspices of the North/South Educational Underachievement Group, proposed that both organisations engage in a joint project that involved co-ordinating key findings from the existing literacy and numeracy work.

This proposal was seen to have a number of potential benefits for teachers, including promoting and supporting the role of self-evaluation in schools, helping to co-ordinate existing practice and facilitating further the sharing of expertise. It is hoped that by reaching a wider audience through this report, there will be greater awareness of the nature and scope of the work of the Inspectorates and of the effective practices in schools in both jurisdictions.

The quality of teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy is fundamental to children's success in school in all areas of learning. High quality teaching must be supported by effective whole-school policies and frameworks, and clearly targeted at all learners' needs and prior learning. Teaching and learning must be planned and designed to move all learners from where they are to where they need to be. To this end, it is important that good practice is identified and shared in order to help promote continuing improvement.

This report indicates the key characteristics of good practice in the areas of literacy and numeracy. In addition, a series of prompts has been included to help primary schools, and teachers in particular, become more self-evaluative through professional discussion and debate, in order to bring about improvement in the children's experiences in literacy and numeracy, and thereby help to raise standards.

It is hoped that this report will assist schools as they strive toward improving standards in literacy and numeracy for all children.

Literacy

Planning for literacy is effective when:

- teachers' planning meets the needs of all learners and is based on all formal and informal assessment outcomes;
- the promotion and development of literacy skills is planned for within and across each curriculum area;
- planning for the promotion and development of oral language permeates all aspects of literacy and all areas of the curriculum;
- planning for literacy demonstrates progression and coherence in the children's learning experiences within and across each year group;
- teachers plan appropriate learning objectives/intentions within a specific time frame for the development of the children's oral language writing and reading skills;
- class teachers and special educational support teachers are given the opportunity to plan together;
- all planning identifies agreed methodology for teaching, e.g. phonics, word-recognition skills, spellings and comprehension skills.

Questions to help teachers and co-ordinators bring about improvement when planning for literacy

1. *To what degree do your assessment outcomes inform future planning?*
2. *To what extent does your planning facilitate coherence and progression in all aspects of literacy?*

Focusing on oral language

Teaching and learning in literacy are effective when:

- teachers give sufficient time to allow considered responses by the children, using these responses effectively to engage others in reflection and discussion;
- there is effective use of open-ended questioning to encourage thinking skills and extended responses;

- a variety of teaching approaches is used, affording pupils regular opportunities to use language to analyse, predict, synthesise, describe, present, debate and summarise;
- appropriate teaching strategies are used to promote a greater emphasis on talking and listening, especially in the early years where activities, such as 'show and tell' and singing and rhyme sessions, promote these skills as part of play-based learning;

Focusing on Reading

Teaching and learning in literacy are effective when:

- there is clear and explicit teaching including teacher modelling of specific key reading skills;
- there is evidence from the planning and the children's work to show that the children's reading skills are taught and developed at all levels of their primary education;
- teachers are given the opportunities to become skilled in identifying early reading difficulties and addressing these;
- all teachers have the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills and expertise to help promote the children's phonemic awareness and its importance in the reading process;
- there is a wide range of appropriate literary resources, including ICT applications and suitable collections of non-fiction and fiction texts to promote and support learning and teaching;

Focusing on Writing

Teaching and learning in literacy are effective when:

- it is promoted and taught within and across all the areas of the curriculum;
- children have a broad and enriched range of writing experiences including opportunities to write from their own experiences in a creative, independent manner showing breadth, balance and progression;
- the children's progress and development in writing is not restricted by unnecessary, isolated and unchallenging exercises;

- writing is enjoyable, purposeful and creative taking place within a relaxed, supportive and language-rich environment.

Leadership and management of literacy are effective when:

- there is a shared whole-staff vision of literacy with all teachers demonstrating a commitment towards promoting and developing the literacy skills of all children;
- clear, attainable targets at individual pupil and whole-school level are identified in the school's development/action plan for the development and promotion of literacy;
- good use is made of performance/assessment data to help the teacher track the progress of the children;
- the school's literacy co-ordinator is a role model for good practice and has a sound understanding of pedagogy in the teaching and promotion of literacy at all of the stages of language development;
- class and special educational needs teachers collaborate to ensure that all children, including those with difficulties, receive the most appropriate support;
- short and long-term planning are monitored and evaluated to ensure progression and coherence in the provision.

Questions for teachers and leaders to consider when promoting best practice in literacy

1. *How does the school monitor and track each child's progress in reading, writing and oral development?*
2. *How does the school promote and develop the teachers' skills and expertise in teaching literacy?*
3. *How do the teachers identify the children's difficulties with learning to read?*
4. *How can the use of formal and informal assessment and data be best used to promote improvement?*

Numeracy

Planning for numeracy is effective when:

- the whole-school planning framework provides for progression and continuity through the key mathematical concepts and skills, and provides for a broad and balanced coverage across all strands of the mathematics curriculum;
- the whole-school framework and all teachers' planning in mathematics are focused on the intended learning for the children;
- a differentiated approach to the selection of the intended learning and/or teaching strategies for mathematics is outlined;
- the planning process involves close liaison between the class teacher, the in-class support staff and, when appropriate, the teacher who provides supplementary support to children with special educational needs in mathematics;
- the identification of opportunities and methods through which the children's learning in mathematics can be assessed is an integral part of the planning process;
- teachers use the outcomes of assessment to plan for children's future learning in mathematics.

Questions for teachers and leaders to consider

1. *To what degree is there progression and continuity outlined in the whole-school framework for what the children should know, understand and be able to do?*
2. *To what extent is the children's intended learning a focus of the planning?*
3. *How effectively are the needs of all children being addressed through the planning?*
4. *To what degree does the whole school framework inform the teachers' planning and the classroom practice?*

Teaching and learning in numeracy are effective when:

- teachers use effective questioning and allow children time before answering;

- teachers promote a disposition to explore, predict, test, reason, solve and explain, and a curiosity for mathematical patterns;
- teachers have high expectations for all aspects of the children's work, including presentation of work, recall of basic facts, mathematical reasoning, use of correct mathematical language and competence at computation;
- the children are engaged in purposeful work which includes opportunities for them to practice skills and consolidate their learning, and there is balance between the development of their computational skills, of their knowledge of facts and concepts and of their ability to solve problems;
- the teachers give a high priority to the use of practical equipment and concrete materials as a precursor for more abstract work and as a means of developing a mathematics-rich environment within the classrooms;
- information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively to enhance the teaching and learning of mathematics;
- the teachers are skilled at using a range of formative assessment strategies to ascertain children's mathematical knowledge, understanding and skills;
- the teachers use differentiated learning strategies, building on formative assessment outcomes, in order to enhance the children's mathematical competence;
- the children have opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in other areas of the curriculum and in everyday situations which are meaningful and relevant to them.

Questions for teachers and leaders to consider

1. *Do the teachers have suitably high expectations for what the children will know, understand and be able to do?*
2. *Are the mathematics lessons structured appropriately in order to optimise the learning of all the children?*
3. *During lessons, how fully are all the children actively engaged in purposeful work through which they are learning?*
4. *How effective are the teachers' questions in raising the quality of the children's reasoning and explanations?*

Leadership and management of numeracy are effective when:

- there is a shared vision amongst all the teachers for, and commitment to, what constitutes the most effective and inclusive mathematics provision for the children;
- the curriculum leader for mathematics is a role model for good practice and has a sound understanding of pedagogy and the stages of mathematical development;
- the principal and/or curriculum leader for mathematics ensures that there is close liaison between the support staff and mainstream teachers to ensure that numeracy support is effective and inclusive;
- the children's learning in mathematics and, where appropriate, their assessment outcomes are the foundation for targets within the school development plan, which includes an action plan for mathematics;
- leadership puts structures in place to enable the systematic monitoring and evaluation of policies and practices relating to mathematics in order to inform the development planning process and to support the dissemination of best practice;
- the school's management team gives a high priority to promoting the teachers' understanding of the stages of mathematical development;
- the school's management team promotes parental involvement in the children's mathematical learning.

Questions for teachers and leaders to consider

1. *How well do the leaders, at all levels, lead the learning of mathematics to ensure that all children attain the best they can?*
2. *How well embedded is the understanding of what constitutes effective teaching and learning in mathematics?*
3. *To what degree can the school be described as a mathematics-rich environment with improvement in mathematical learning as one of its core aims?*
4. *How effective are the monitoring and evaluation procedures in leading to revision of practice and subsequently improvement in what the children know, understand and can do?*

Notwithstanding the effective practices in the discrete areas of literacy and numeracy above, across all areas of the primary curriculum it is necessary to ensure:

- Clear learning intentions are established at the beginning of the lesson and shared with the learners;
- The learning intentions are visited appropriately throughout the lesson and consolidated at the end of the lesson;
- Effective questioning is used throughout the lesson to ensure that all learners and teachers are clear about what is being understood;
- The learning enthuses and invites the learner to become part of the learning process;
- The pace of the lessons is apt for the learning and what is being taught.

CONCLUSION

The acquisition and development of literacy and numeracy skills is fundamental in helping children develop a view of, and make sense of, the world around them. Without adequate literacy and numeracy skills the children are greatly disadvantaged regarding their current and future learning potential. If we are serious in our commitment to helping all children contribute to, and benefit from, being members of a rapidly changing society, then we must also be sure that, as a result of their primary education, both formal and informal, they are in the best position to influence and help shape the world of the future and develop as informed and thinking individuals.