

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Survey of

The Provision and Use of the School Library in a Sample of Primary and Post-Primary Schools

INSPECTED: 2004-2005

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Throughout this report a number of quantitative terms are used which should be interpreted as indicated below.

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of the library provision and its effect on teaching and learning, the Inspectorate's judgements relate to four performance levels which may be interpreted as follows:

GRADE	
1	Significant strengths (good ranging to outstanding)
2	Strengths outweigh weaknesses (satisfactory ranging to good)
3	Weaknesses outweigh strengths (fair ranging to satisfactory)
4	Significant weaknesses (poor)

1. INTRODUCTION

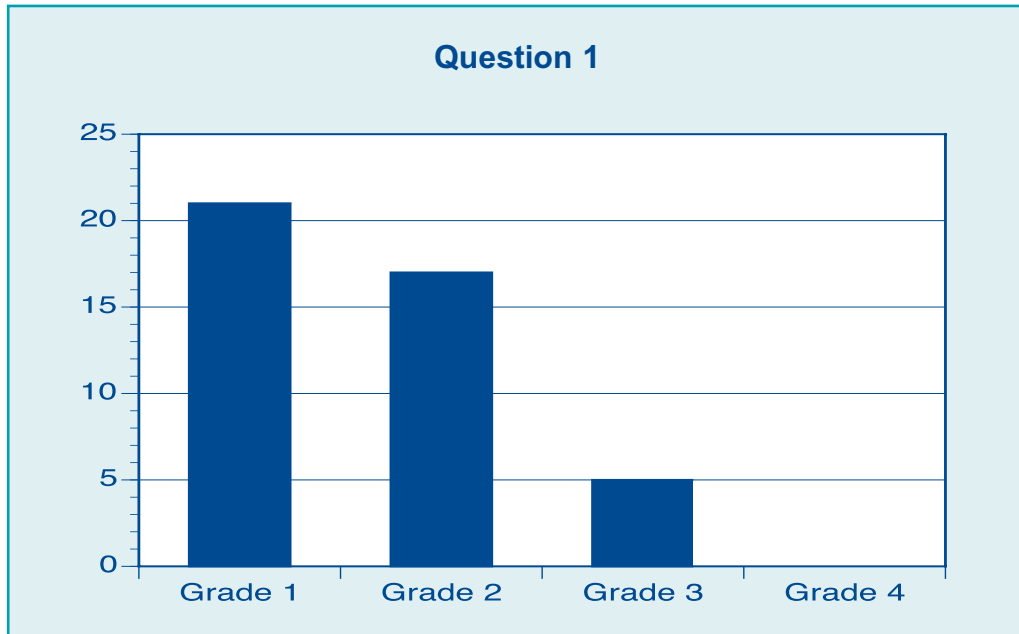
- 1.1 The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has traditionally included consideration of the quality and use of library provision in its inspections of schools. While references to the provision and use of school library facilities have value, the Inspectorate recognises that these general evaluations would not provide a comprehensive overview. The Inspectorate has therefore carried out a survey specifically focused on the use of school libraries in a sample of primary and post-primary schools in Northern Ireland.
- 1.2 School libraries are supported by the work of the Schools' Library Service (SLS) which is provided by the five Education and Library Boards. In addition, Library Guidelines for schools have been produced and distributed by the Library and Information Services Council (LISC), most recently in 2004. The Inspectorate recognises the importance of this support structure and these resources, and, while there are references to their use within this report, they were not the focus of the survey.
- 1.3 The survey was designed to:
- ascertain the extent and quality of the current provision of library facilities in primary and post-primary schools in Northern Ireland;
 - evaluate the effectiveness of the use of that provision in supporting learning and teaching in schools;
 - identify the strengths and the areas for improvement in schools' library provision, and library policies, and in the outworking of those policies in supporting learners; and
 - disseminate the main findings with a view to improving provision and practice.

2. PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- 2.1 District Inspectors surveyed 43 primary schools (listed in Appendix 1) selected at random across the five Education and Library Boards. In almost all primary schools the library provision was satisfactory or better. Almost all schools provided class libraries and/or central libraries which catered for the whole school. In a minority of schools

the library provision was limited to collections of books housed in the classrooms.

3. WHAT WAS THE QUALITY OF LIBRARY PROVISION?



THE OVERALL QUALITY OF LIBRARY PROVISION

3.1 In the more effective practice:

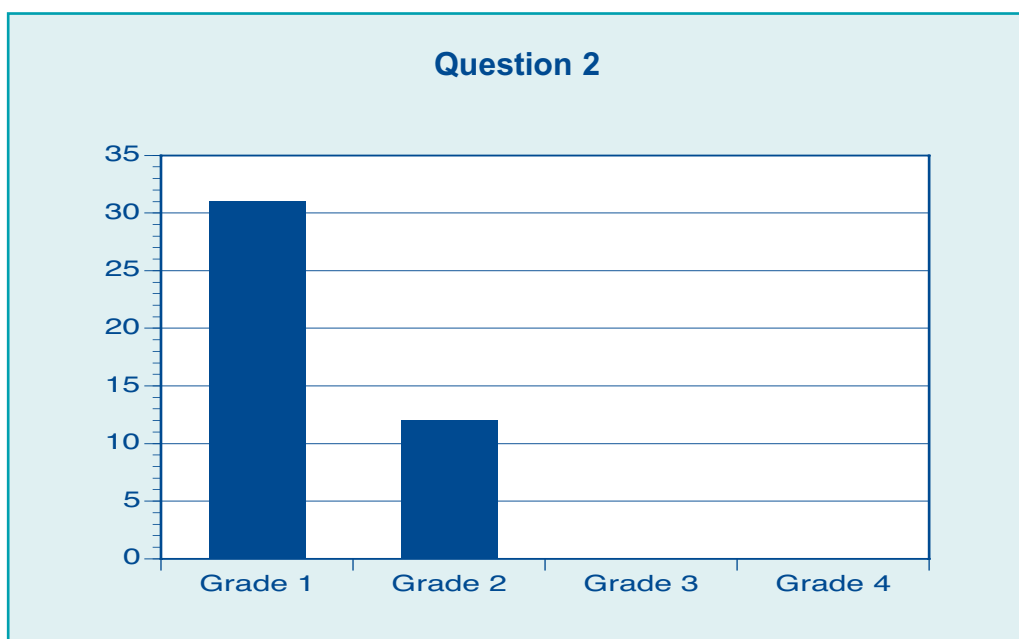
- the range of books was well matched to the children's differing abilities and interests;
- the schools had built up a good range of texts and other resources to support topic and project work;
- each class had its own library which supported the work in the classroom;
- the children in year 6 and 7 classes assisted with the arrangements for borrowing and lending in the library;
- computer and internet facilities were accessible in the library;
- there was evidence that the Education and Library Boards' Schools' Library Service facilitated readily the requests made by individual teachers for texts and other resources;

- a clear borrowing policy had been agreed by the staff;
- the teachers valued the library as an important resource to support learning and teaching; and
- the children had acquired library skills and used them competently and confidently to support their learning.

3.2 In the very small number of schools where the practice was less effective:

- no borrowing policy was in place;
- no consideration was given to including information and communication technology (ICT) in the library provision;
- the stock was old, unattractive and of poor quality;
- the extent of the stock of books was only two or three books per child; and
- the quality of library resources to support the learning and teaching throughout the school was poor.

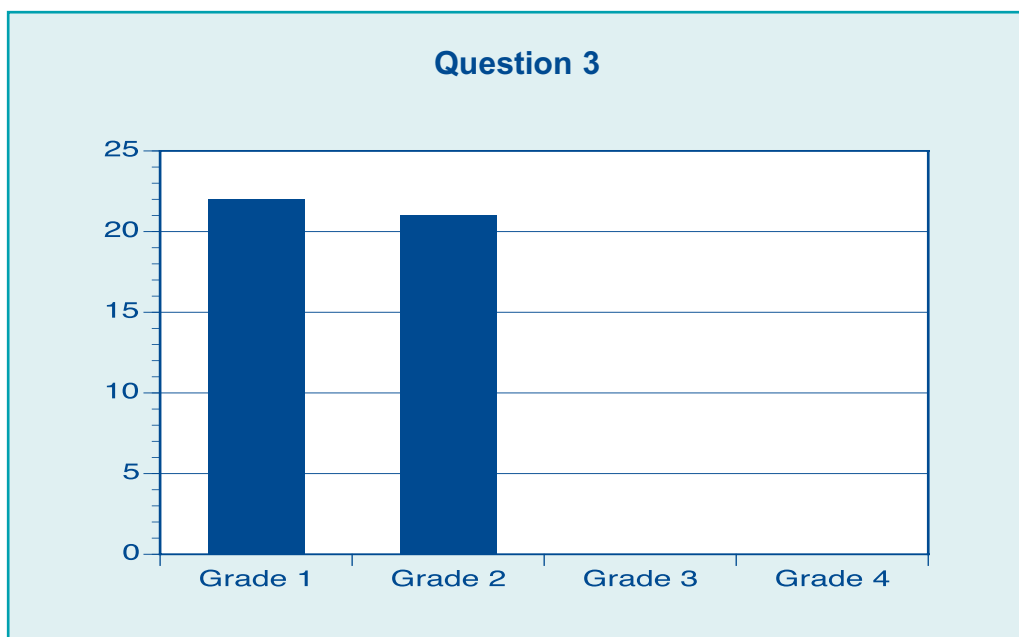
4. WHAT WAS THE QUALITY OF THE ETHOS OF THE LIBRARY PROVISION?



THE QUALITY OF ETHOS

- 4.1 In almost all schools in the survey, regardless of the nature of the library provision:
- the teachers encouraged the children to read for pleasure;
 - the environment was conducive to fostering reading for pleasure;
 - Book Weeks played an important part in the life of the school;
 - the children made good use of local libraries;
 - effective use was made of the local SLS, particularly in relation to topic work, when schools were supplied with fiction, reference texts and resources to support the children's learning across the curriculum;
 - appropriate time was allocated to planned library sessions for individual classes;
 - books were prominently displayed throughout the school; and
 - good emphasis was placed on promoting research from up-to-date print material and CD-ROMS to stimulate interest on the part of readers at different stages of development and with different interests.

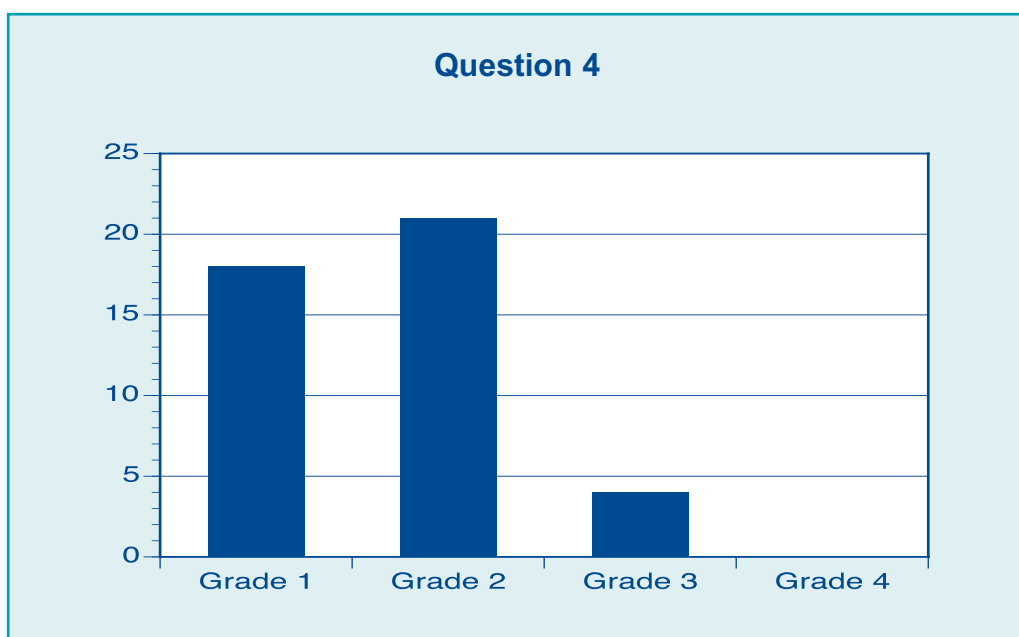
5. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING



5.1 In almost all of the schools visited, the following activities were used to promote and enhance the quality of learning and teaching:

- the availability and integration of books within areas for play activities;
- visits from the local librarian;
- the involvement of parents, for example, in reading stories to children or in presentation of displays or in supporting the administration of the library programme;
- the preparation and use of detailed schemes to develop library skills across the primary years;
- a good range of books, other texts, CD-ROMS and tapes which were available to support class topic work;
- visits from story-tellers, theatre groups and authors;
- the use of the class novels linked effectively to other areas of the curriculum;
- older children making books for and reading books to the younger children; and
- the involvement of children in writing projects which required research and using various non-fiction books.

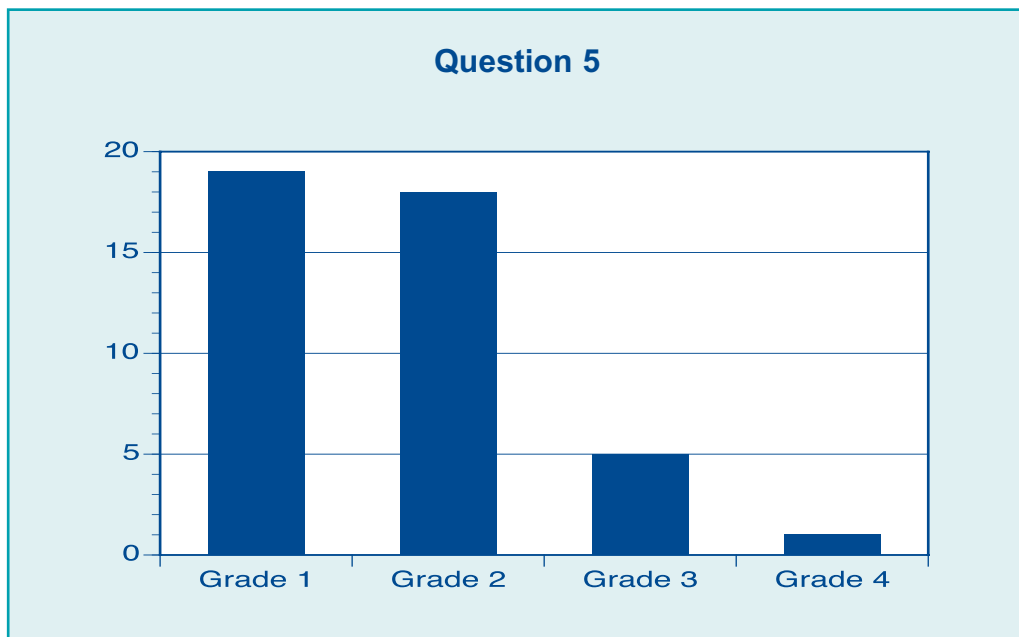
6. THE CURRICULUM



THE QUALITY OF LIBRARY PROVISION IN SUPPORTING THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM

- 6.1 Researching, handling data and using information skills were integrated into the whole-school curriculum in most schools in the survey.
- 6.2 In the more effective practice observed:
- whole-school and individual teachers' planning highlighted the development of information skills within the context of a wide range of subjects;
 - there was good evidence that library and research skills were being developed in a cross-curricular manner, for example, in the teaching of history, geography and science;
 - the children benefited from doing project work which required them to access information from sources such as books and the Internet;
 - the schools focused on identifying learning outcomes in their planning; the best practice highlighted clearly the specific information skills to be developed; and
 - the children were provided with opportunities to present information in a variety of oral and written forms and in visual presentations.
- 6.3 In the small number of schools where the practice was less effective:
- information handling skills were poorly developed; children merely transcribed text from the original source; and
 - the information gained was rarely analysed or used by the children to help their learning.

7. MANAGEMENT



THE QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT OF LIBRARY PROVISION

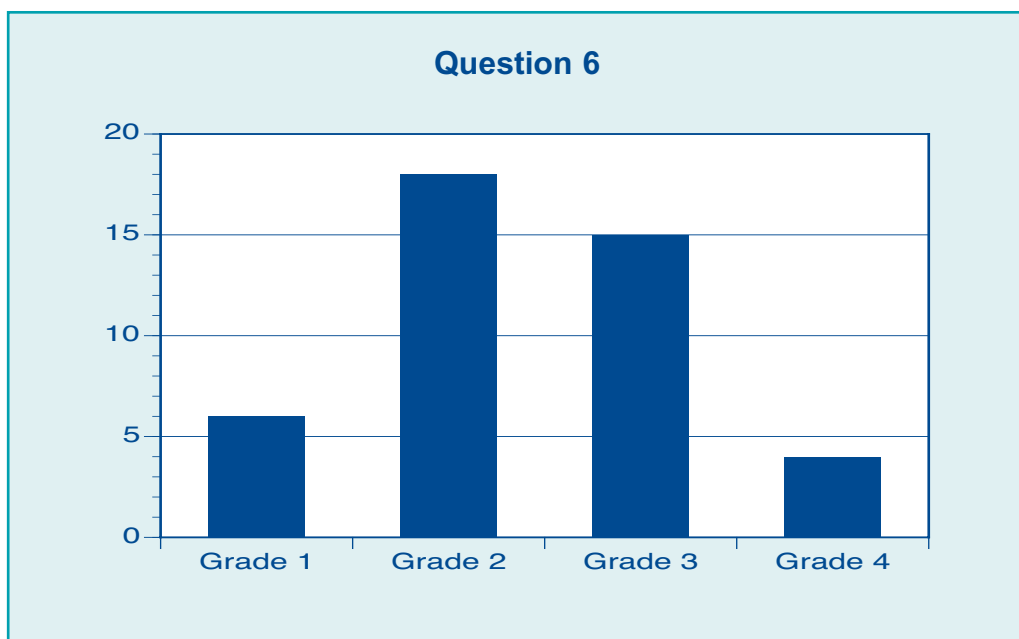
- 7.1 Most schools recognise the important role which the library plays in promoting and improving the quality of learning and teaching.
- 7.2 The more effective practice had the following key characteristics:
- a library policy set out clearly the aims and objectives in terms of developing discrete library skills and made the case for using the library as an integral resource for learning and teaching across the curriculum;
 - the school development plan identified the potential of the school library to support the curriculum and promote improvement in standards of achievement and independence in learning;
 - all staff had responsibility for selecting books for the school library provision;
 - a library co-ordinator read through the teachers' planners and tracked the library skills being taught and applied by the learners in order to ensure coherence in their programme; and

- there was a policy on promoting reading habits and on encouraging the sharing of books amongst the children.

7.3 In a minority of schools:

- the use and work of the library were not guided or supported by any overall planning by the staff;
- there was no monitoring of provision, borrowing or impact of the use of the library; and
- there was limited awareness of the potential of the library to support learning and teaching, to foster independence and resourcefulness and to contribute to improvement in standards of achievement.

8. STAFF DEVELOPMENT



STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- staff development in helping schools maximises the impact of the library for learning and enjoyment is limited;
- too few teachers use the limited support which is available; and
- in the best practice, the librarian or teacher librarian worked with teaching and support staff to help them develop and make good

use of the library and its resources to support learning and teaching, to promote amongst the children positive attitudes to library usage and to stimulate them to read for pleasure and information.

9. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

WHAT WAS THE OVERALL QUALITY OF THE LIBRARY PROVISION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON LEARNING AND TEACHING?

- 9.1 The following were the key strengths in the library provision and its impact on learning and teaching:
- Despite the variation in the extent and the quality of library accommodation in schools, the quality of provision in almost all was satisfactory or better.
 - Good use was made of the SLS and the range of resources which it provided.
 - In almost all schools there was a positive ethos which encouraged children to read for pleasure.
 - In almost all schools a wide range of activities was used to promote and enhance the learning and teaching.
 - In most schools the teachers were planning to help the children locate, select, evaluate and communicate information relevant to a particular task.
 - In most schools teachers recognised the value of the library in relation to supporting learning and teaching and this was reflected in their planning.
 - In a minority of schools the librarian/teacher librarian was providing helpful support and in-service (INSET) training for the teachers.
 - The access to and availability of ICT in the library in some schools influenced helpfully the quality of the children's learning experiences.

9.2 The following were the key shortcomings in the provision overall:

- Not all teachers recognise and plan for the contribution that the library provision can make to help improve and enhance the quality of learning and teaching.
- Not all schools monitor and evaluate the use and impact of the library provision in order to improve standards of achievement.

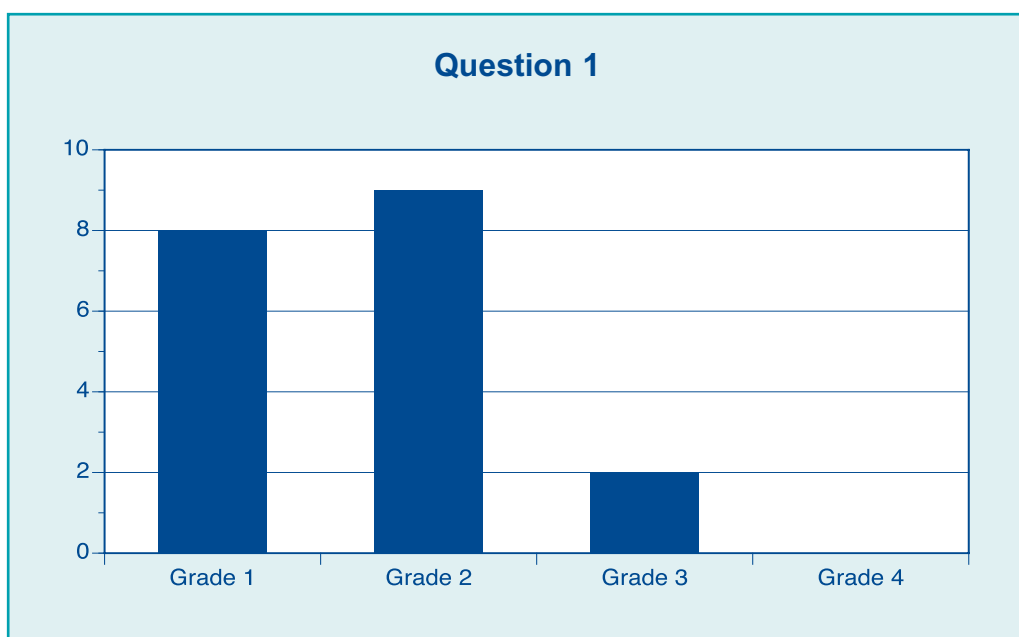
9.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is important the in-service programme offered by the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) includes, particularly in literacy training, the role of the library and the enhancement to learning and teaching that good library provision and usage can bring.

10. POST-PRIMARY

10.1 A small team of inspectors surveyed 19 post-primary schools (listed in Appendix 1) selected at random from all five Education and Library Boards. In almost all post-primary schools the library provision was satisfactory or better.

11. WHAT WAS THE QUALITY OF LIBRARY PROVISION?

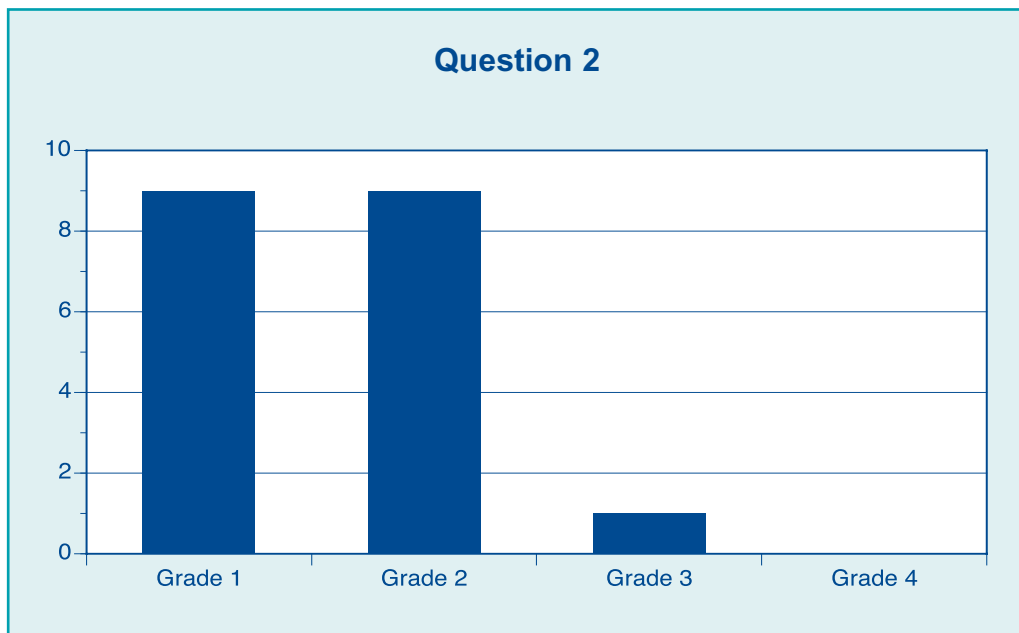


THE OVERALL QUALITY OF LIBRARY PROVISION

11.1 In assessing the quality of the provision and use of library facilities in the sample of schools inspectors found that:

- strengths outweighed weakness in all but two of the schools visited;
- staff were working hard despite any deficiencies in terms of centrally held resources;
- the English departments make most use of the library facilities;
- in a minority of schools there were some deficiencies in aspects of accommodation or the stock of centrally held resources; and
- a small number of subject departments report that the increasing ease of access to ICT, both within the school and at home, has reduced to some degree the use that is made of the central library and its resources.

12. WHAT WAS THE QUALITY OF THE ETHOS OF THE LIBRARY PROVISION?



THE QUALITY OF ETHOS

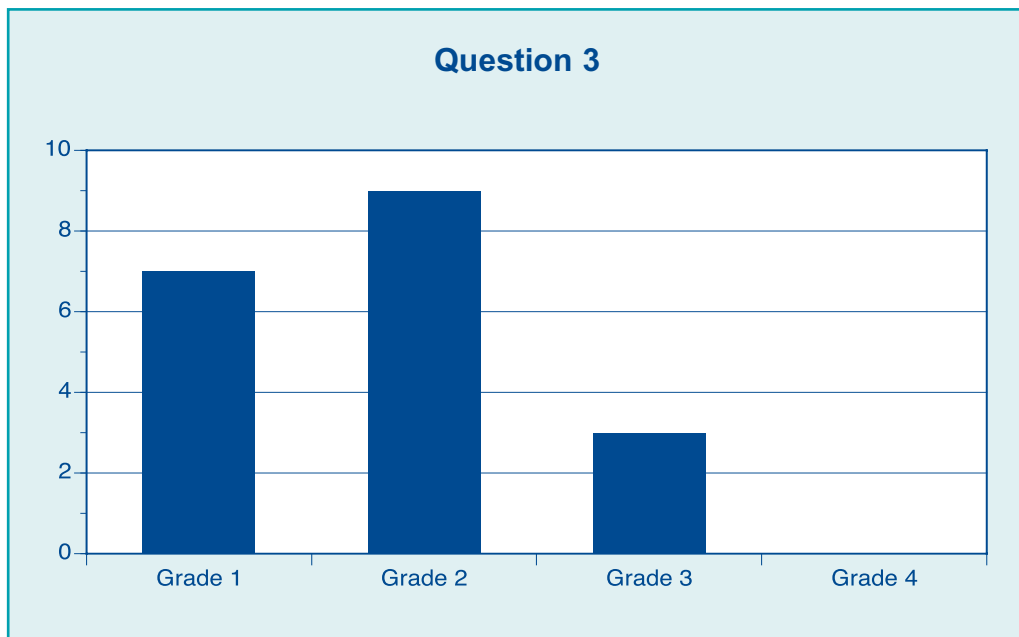
12.1 In almost all schools:

- the central library was recognised as a valuable resource for the entire school community;
- good efforts had been made to ensure that it was attractive and welcoming for the pupils and staff;
- the stock of fiction and non-fiction was often well selected to relate to the ages, abilities and interests of the learners;
- the display space within and close to the library was used creatively to promote engagement with literature or topics which were of interest to the pupils;
- staff monitored in formal or informal ways the pupils' reading records and used the information to anticipate trends or respond to events;
- most library staff recognised the importance of setting a tone in the library that related to but was tangibly different from that in most classrooms and reflected the intention to encourage individuals or small groups to pursue independently particular and personal interests;
- pupils generally responded well to the library environment and treated the resources and facilities with respect;
- the teachers and library staff encouraged the pupils to contribute to the work of running and monitoring the library; and
- the school and library staff promoted successfully the library and its resources through holding Book Weeks, hosting commercial book clubs and inviting authors to the school.

12.2 In a minority of schools:

- the use of the library is restricted by the availability of staff to supervise and administer the library, accommodation and stock.

13. THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

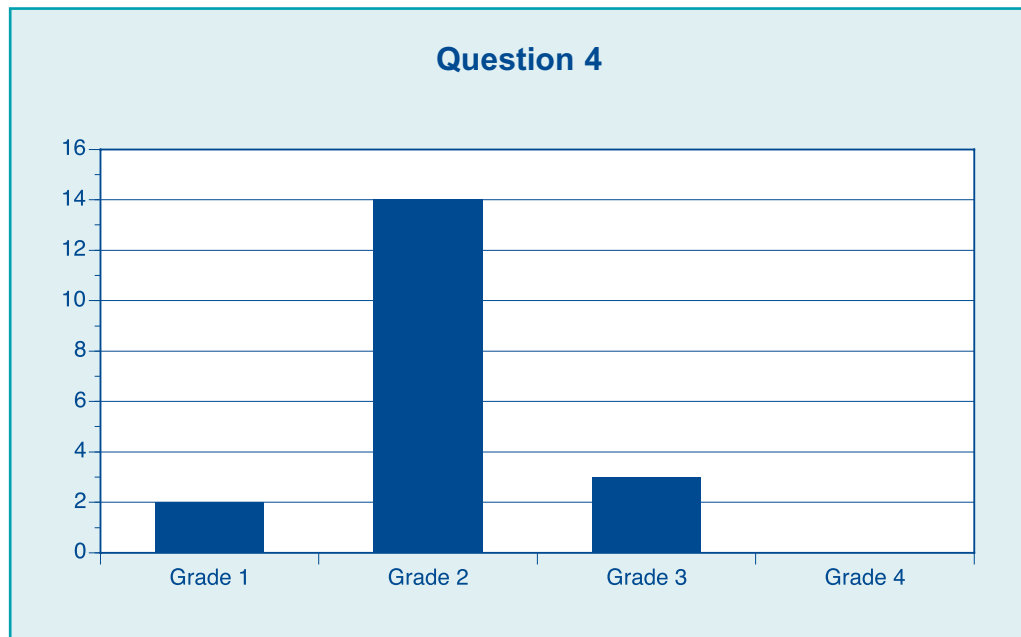


THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

13.1 In the majority of lessons visited and in the activities observed:

- the tone set by the teachers was positive;
- the approaches used by many of the teachers to teaching and learning were supportive of the development of library skills;
- many teachers used successfully the library resources available to enhance the learning experiences of the pupils;
- many subject departments build into their teaching schemes, and use extensively in their subject-specific curriculum, the development of library and learning skills;
- only a small number of the schools visited evaluated, in a regular and systematic manner, the use made of the library to support learning and teaching; and
- it was also evident that in a small number of schools the subject specialists had very limited knowledge of the library stock that was available to support their subject work.

14. THE CURRICULUM



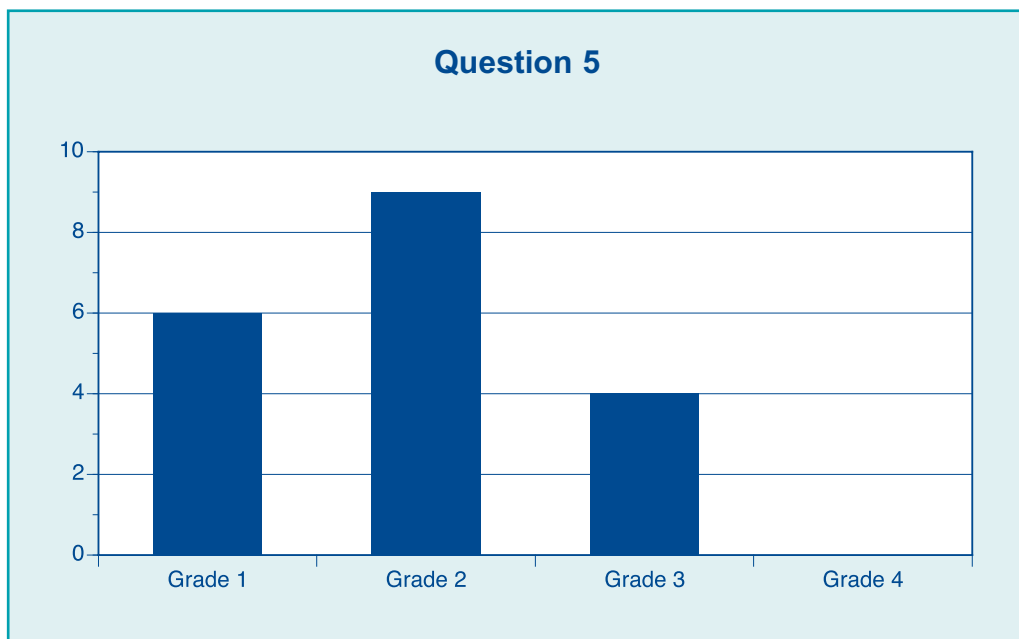
THE QUALITY OF LIBRARY PROVISION IN SUPPORTING THE POST-PRIMARY PRIMARY CURRICULUM

14.1 In most schools:

- a discrete library skills programme was available in Key Stage 3; most often this was taught by members of the English department;
- an effective induction programme was available for year 8 pupils and good opportunities existed for the development of personal reading in years 8 to 10;
- helpfully, the library facilities were made available at morning and at lunch breaks; and
- the pupils in formal library classes were able both to identify the most appropriate sources within the library to assist them in their research, and to extract the detailed information they required from the sources within the library.

- 14.2 In a small number of schools visited the first recourse of many junior pupils was to ICT resources even though the stock of books available was excellent and would have provided a much better means of helping to refine their search.

15. MANAGEMENT

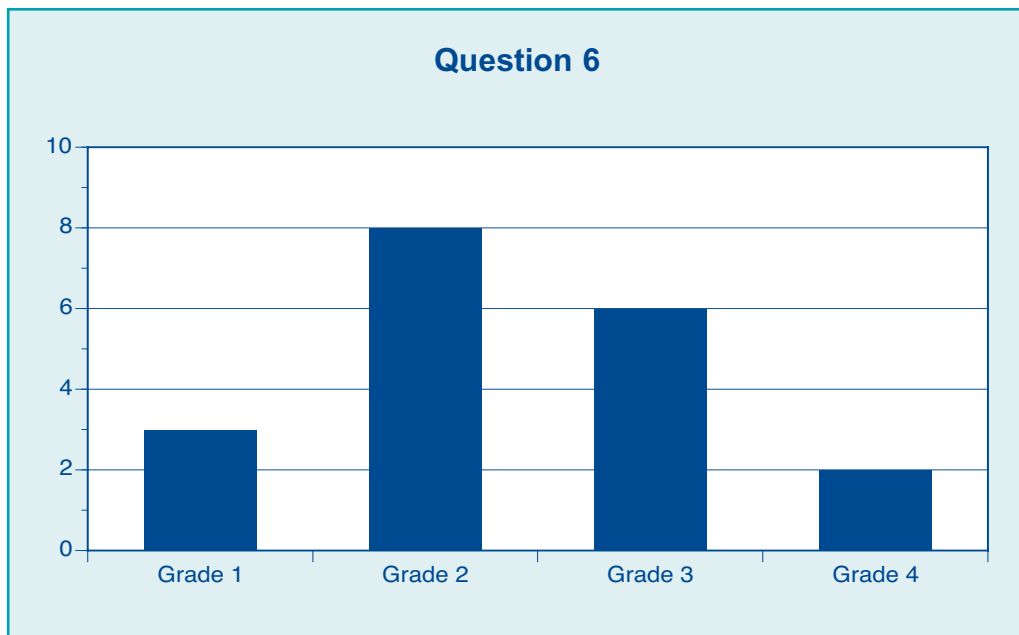


THE QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT OF LIBRARY PROVISION

- 15.1 There is some variation in the quality and management of school libraries.
- 15.2 In the most successful:
- there was a clear and strong commitment from those with senior management responsibility to the work of the school library;
 - there was a strong emphasis on promoting the work of the school library within the school development planning; and
 - the schools had detailed and informative policies for the use of the library.

15.3 In a minority of schools:

- no policies existed to support the work of the library;
- the library policies focused only on resourcing and administration with limited comment on the use of the library to support learning and teaching;
- no attempts had been made to review systematically the policy for the use of the library's facilities despite the changes which have taken place in the school curriculum and in the provision of ICT resources;
- subject teachers played no part in contributing to and evaluating any development plans for the library and its usage; and
- schools that had identified the need to foster independent learning in the school development plan made no reference to the contribution of the library in pursuing this aim.



16. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- 16.1 Many school librarians reported that they had benefited from courses, provided by the Education and Library Boards and the staff of the SLS, particularly those related to the management of stock using ICT;

- overall schools reported that access to INSET was limited in recent years; and
- several school librarians have been involved in New Opportunities Funding (NOF) training but recently appointed librarians have not received this training.

16.2 There is a need to ensure:

- that school librarians are fully involved in the life and work of the school; and
- that all teachers are aware of the importance of disseminating good practice regarding the use of the library across and within all subject departments.

17. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

17.1 The following were the key strengths in the library provision and its effect on learning and teaching:

- most library staff recognised the importance of setting a tone in the library that related to but was tangibly different from that in most classrooms and reflected the intention to encourage individuals or small groups to pursue independently particular and personal interests; and
- the pupils in formal library classes were able to identify the most appropriate sources within the library to assist them in their research, and to extract the detailed information they required from the sources within the library.

17.2 In the most successful provision:

- there was a clear and strong commitment from those with senior management responsibility to the school library and an understanding of its potential to support learning;
- within the school development plan an emphasis was placed on promoting the work of the library; and

- the schools had detailed and informative policies for the use of the library and these were reflected in practice.

17.3 The following were the key shortcomings in the provision overall:

- in general, subject departments, other than the English department, do not exploit the full potential of the library facilities;
- in a minority of schools there were some deficiencies in aspects of accommodation or the stock of centrally held resources;
- a small number of subject departments report that the increasing ease of access to ICT, both within the school and at home, has reduced to some degree the use that is made of the central library and its resources;
- in a minority of schools the use of the library is restricted by the availability of staff to supervise and administer the library, accommodation and stock;
- subject teachers play little or no part in contributing to and evaluating any development plans for the library; and
- schools that had identified the need to foster independent learning in the school development plan made no reference to the contribution of the library in pursuing this aim.

17.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is important that all subject teachers are aware of, and plan for, the best use of the library provision when fostering independent learning within their subjects.
- Subject teachers should contribute to, monitor, and evaluate any development plans for the use of the library.

18. CONCLUSION

- 18.1 Throughout the survey many examples were observed of good use being made of the library in promoting learning and teaching. In the best practice, it was clear that schools had realised the importance of the library as a centrally managed resource and used it effectively to promote teaching and learning both within and across the subjects of the Northern Ireland Curriculum.
- 18.2 In primary schools particularly, many teachers praised the quality of the resources provided by SLS and commented on the valuable contribution that this service makes to support thematic work in particular. Despite limited space most primary schools have been creative and successful in their efforts to provide accommodation for a defined library area and good quality library resources for the learners.
- 18.3 Post-primary schools benefit from the provision of dedicated accommodation for the school library and, in general, good use is made of this provision. A positive and productive tone is set in most school libraries that is supportive of and complementary to the tone in the subject classrooms. A strong feature of many schools is the way in which the pupils are encouraged to contribute to the work of running the library. There is much evidence to show that reading for pleasure is still popular in the post-primary sector, particularly in key stage 3. The recent emphasis placed on literature for teenagers has helped encourage this interest. The more progressive schools have made good use of information and guidance, for example that provided in the LISC materials, to review and improve the work of the library. In a minority of schools, library policy is too narrowly focused on resourcing and administration with little guidance on the use of the library to support learning and teaching.
- 18.4 The part the library plays in enriching the pupils' reading skills and developing their skills as independent readers and resourceful, self-reliant learners cannot be ignored. Such skills will stand children and young people in good stead both within and beyond their time at school. The influence that the library plays in bringing about improvement is best seen when all teachers plan for and make creative use of this important central resource.

APPENDIX

LIST OF SCHOOLS THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE LIBRARY PROVISION SURVEY

Primary Schools

Academy Primary School, Saintfield
Anahorish Primary School, Toomebridge
Ballygolan Primary School, Newtownabbey
Ballykelly Primary School
Ballyvester Primary School, Donaghadee
Birches Primary School, Portadown
Botanic Primary School, Belfast
Braidside Integrated Primary School, Ballymena
Bridge Integrated Primary School, Banbridge
Cavehill Primary School, Belfast
Downpatrick Primary School
Dromore Primary School
Forge Integrated Primary School, Belfast
Friends' School Preparatory Department, Lisburn
Hazelwood Integrated Primary School, Belfast
Kilbride Central Primary School, Doagh
Londonderry Model Primary School, Londonderry
Millstrand Integrated Primary School, Portrush
Omagh Integrated Primary School
Our Lady's Primary School, Belfast
Our Lady Queen of Peace Primary School
Rasharkin Primary School
Riverdale Primary School, Lisburn
Seagoe Primary School, Portadown
St Anne's Primary School, Strabane
St Anthony's Primary School, Larne
St Bernard's Primary School, Newtownabbey
St Bride's Primary School, Belfast
St Colman's Abbey Primary School, Newry
St Colum's Primary School, Portstewart

St Francis Primary School, Lurgan
St Joseph's Primary School, Donemana
St Joseph's Primary School, Dunloy
St Macartan's Primary School, Loughinisland
St Mary's Primary School, Portaferry
St Patrick's Primary School, Donaghmore
St Patrick's Primary School, Gortin
St Patrick's Primary School, Londonderry
St Peter's Primary School, Charlemont
St Tierney's Primary School, Roslea
Tempo Primary School, Enniskillen
Victoria College Preparatory Department, Belfast
Windmill Integrated Primary School

Post-Primary Schools

Ashfield Girls' High School, Belfast
Ballyclare Secondary School
Belfast High School
Convent Grammar School, Strabane
Donaghadee High School
Integrated College Dungannon
Limavady High school
Lismore Comprehensive College, Craigavon
Parkhall College, Antrim
Saintfield High School
Strathearn School, Belfast
St Aiden's High School, Enniskillen
St Colman's High School, Ballynahinch
St Joseph's Boys' High School, Londonderry
St Joseph's High School, Plumbridge
St Louis' Grammar School, Ballymena
St Patrick's College, Banbridge
The High School Ballynahinch
Wellington College, Belfast

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