



Reading for purpose *and* pleasure

An evaluation of the teaching of
reading in primary schools

Age group Primary	Published December 2004	Reference no. HMI 2393
----------------------	----------------------------	---------------------------

Contents

Introduction and evidence base	3
Main findings	4
Commentary	5
Points for action	6
Background	7
Reading standards in the sample schools	9
Pupils' reading skills and strategies	10
Pupils' attitudes	12
Leadership and management	14
Quality of the teaching of reading	19
Identification, intervention and support	24
Parental support	26

Introduction and evidence base

1. This survey was undertaken to identify reasons for the wide range in attainment in reading among primary-aged pupils; to disseminate schools' effective practice in reducing underachievement and developing pupils' positive attitudes to reading; and to describe key features of the successful teaching of reading.
2. Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) visited 45 schools for one day each in the autumn term 2003 or the spring term 2004. The schools were selected to represent a national sample in terms of size and socio-economic circumstances. Schools varied in size from 93 to 588 pupils. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) ranged from 3% to 68%. The percentage of pupils learning English as an additional language (EAL) ranged from 0% to 96%. In the main, the sample comprised schools which, when compared to schools in similar contexts, had either particularly high or low attainment in reading as measured by the end of Key Stage 1 national tests in 2003. This enabled inspectors to examine factors which led to success in teaching reading.
3. HMI observed the teaching of reading in 137 lessons and reading intervention sessions, listened to 100 individual pupils reading and talking about books, held discussions with headteachers, other senior staff and co-ordinators for English and special educational needs (SEN), and examined documentation, including policy statements, reading records and test data. Lessons were observed across the primary school age range including the Foundation Stage although, in the autumn term 2003, HMI concentrated on Year 2, Year 3 and Year 4 and, in the spring term 2004, on the Reception year, Year 1 and Year 2.

Main findings

- Attainment in reading varied too greatly between schools which were contextually very similar.
- In effective schools, high standards in reading were underpinned by a whole-school commitment to ensure that all pupils could read. This embodied a cohesive approach to teaching, assessment and effective intervention which was consistently applied.
- The headteachers of the effective schools were knowledgeable about how to teach reading and involved themselves actively in improving it. Strong leadership and management ensured that everyone was committed to raising standards. The headteachers of the ineffective schools, in contrast, often did not know enough about teaching reading and failed to provide decisive leadership.
- The quality of teaching was generally better in the schools with high standards in reading at the end of Key Stage 1. High quality teaching, including intervention and support for low-attaining pupils, had a direct impact on attainment.
- The schools with high standards identified pupils' difficulties in reading early on. They tracked progress well and used intervention programmes wisely, providing relevant support before the gap between low-attaining pupils and their peers widened and damaged their self-esteem. In many of the ineffective schools, however, one intervention programme followed another with too little evaluation of their appropriateness and impact.
- The teaching of phonics was good in the schools with high standards. Rapid, early coverage of phonic knowledge and skills ensured that pupils had a strong foundation for decoding. In the ineffective schools, low expectations of the speed at which pupils should acquire phonic knowledge and skills too often hindered their progress and achievement.
- The schools which were successful in raising reading standards and tackling underachievement taught a broad range of strategies early on, including the use of words recognised on sight, context and grammar.
- Most schools have well-organised libraries and encourage pupils to borrow books. However, they give too little time to teaching pupils how to use the library to research information for themselves.
- Most schools used guided reading as one way of teaching reading. However, its quality in the ineffective schools was unsatisfactory in one third of lessons. Too many teachers did not understand its principles and struggled to teach it successfully.
- Most pupils were positive about reading. However, pupils who lacked competence and were not making progress often developed negative attitudes. Effective intervention programmes were frequently successful in reversing these because pupils improved their skills, recognised the progress they were making and were motivated to improve further.
- Although some schools were successfully raising reading attainment and were teaching pupils the skills they needed to read with accuracy and understanding, few were successfully engaging the interest of those who, though competent readers, did not read for pleasure. Schools seldom built on pupils' own reading interests and the range of reading material they read outside school.
- One of the marked differences between the effective and ineffective schools in raising achievement in reading was the way in which they recognised and tackled their weaknesses. Effective schools did so honestly, knowledgeably and strategically. The ineffective schools, however, were often hindered by a culture of low expectation. They failed to examine their own practice critically enough, often blaming others for pupils' low achievement.
- Teaching assistants often worked with some of the most challenging groups and individual pupils. They frequently bore the main responsibility for listening to them read. However, they did not always have enough confidence and knowledge about teaching reading to adapt intervention programmes where it was necessary.
- Schools which were successful in developing parental support for reading focused on specific initiatives that involved parents actively in reading with their children. The ineffective schools were also keen to involve parents but encouraged their general involvement rather than specific engagement in reading.

Commentary

4. The last few years have seen a marked improvement in the reading standards achieved by thousands of children across the country. That has been a genuine success story. However, the continuing variability in performance, highlighted by school data and the findings of this survey, raises significant questions about the need for an even more active intervention policy in those schools where standards are low and continue to remain low. It is unacceptable that too many children do not learn to read properly because the adults who teach them lack sufficient knowledge to do so effectively. This might have been understandable a decade ago, but not today.

5. Learning to read is the foundation for future educational success. All pupils deserve this basic entitlement and there can be no hiding place for those schools in which children fail to receive such a basic entitlement. In recent years, action has been taken to assist schools where reading standards are low, but this report suggests that there is still much to be done. Therefore, as a matter of urgency, those with national and local responsibility for improving literacy need to identify those schools with the lowest standards in reading and expect them to prepare a bespoke plan of action. That should be coupled with the clear signal that continual underperformance in the reading standards achieved by pupils will no longer be acceptable. The detailed recommendations listed below are intended to support this process.

Points for action

6. To raise standards, reduce the tail of underachievement and develop positive attitudes to reading, those with **national responsibility** for developing policy and guidance for schools should:
 - improve headteachers' leadership and management of the teaching of reading by taking steps to increase their subject knowledge and their confidence.

7. Those with responsibility for supporting schools at **local education authority (LEA)** level should:
 - continue to provide training on guided reading
 - ensure that teachers and teaching assistants understand and use intervention programmes effectively
 - disseminate effective practice, particularly successful strategies for engaging parental support for reading.

8. To raise attainment in reading, reduce the tail of underachievement in reading and improve pupils' attitudes, **schools** should:
 - raise teachers' expectations about the standards pupils can achieve in reading
 - exploit the full range of reading opportunities across the curriculum
 - improve teachers' subject knowledge, including phonics
 - teach pupils a broad range of strategies early on, alongside phonics, to support their decoding and understanding
 - identify pupils with reading difficulties early, intervene effectively and monitor the impact of support through assessing pupils' progress
 - involve parents actively in supporting their children's reading.

Background

9. A report by Ofsted in 1993, *Access and achievement in urban education*, drew attention to underachievement by significant numbers of pupils in urban schools. It noted that these pupils required particularly skilled teaching of oral and written communication, including reading. Following its publication, Ofsted undertook an enquiry into the teaching of reading in inner-city schools in London. *The teaching of reading in 45 inner-London primary schools* (1996) was the result, in which Ofsted reported that standards of literacy were not high enough.

10 Among its detailed findings, the report observed:

The wide gulf in pupils' reading performance is serious and unacceptable. Some schools and pupils are doing well against the odds while others in similar circumstances are not. It is clear that it is what individual schools do that makes the difference to their pupils' reading performance.

and

The wide variation in teaching quality, reflected in the underachievement of many pupils in reading, is the central problem that must be confronted by these schools and LEAs.

It noted the need for 'urgent action' to improve provision, including 'improvements in the knowledge and skills of the existing teaching force' which would require 'systematic in-service training of primary teachers in the teaching of reading with a clear emphasis on phonics'. It also noted that 'headteachers should give specific attention to the management and organisation of the teaching of reading, including the analysis and use of all relevant test data'. The report noted that they needed to play a more prominent role in monitoring the quality of teaching across the school, since the unevenness to which the report drew attention hampered pupils' progress. If headteachers delegated such responsibilities, they were to make sure that they were carried out 'rigorously'.

11. Immediately following the publication of *The teaching of reading*, the government set up its Literacy Task Force, which was charged with developing 'a strategy for substantially raising standards of literacy in primary schools over a five to ten year period'. The task force's final report (1997) was wide-ranging and established the foundations for the implementation and development of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS).

12. In line with the recommendations of the Literacy Task Force, Ofsted has inspected and reported on the NLS since 1998, both generically and in relation to specific issues, such as the teaching of phonics or support for early literacy. These reports are available on Ofsted's website.

13. Two other studies provide a background to this report. The first is the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) led by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This study is conducted every three years. In the 2000 study, the United Kingdom was ranked eighth out of 32 of the principal industrialised countries which took part. The PISA assessments tested the skills of 15-year-olds in literacy within reading, mathematics and science, looking at the extent to which young people were acquiring the wider knowledge, skills and competencies they needed as adults.

14. The second study is the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), a comparison of achievement in reading which was carried out for the first time in 2001. England was ranked third among the 35 countries which took part, behind Sweden and the Netherlands. The results showed that pupils in England performed relatively better in reading for literary purposes (where they were ranked equal first in the study, together with Sweden) than in responding to information texts (where they were ranked fifth). One of the most important findings, however, was that while England's most able pupils were the highest scoring among the participating countries, its low-achieving pupils were ranked much lower. In other words, there was a much wider spread of attainment in England (as well as in other English-speaking countries) than in the

countries of Continental Europe. The latter were more likely to have a narrower range of attainment. This well-known 'tail' of underachievement provides some of the impetus for this report. A further important finding was that pupils in England, despite their high scores, had poorer attitudes to reading and read less often for pleasure than pupils of a similar age in other countries. Boys' attitudes were less positive than those of girls. Pupils' attitudes, therefore, are also a subject of this report.

Reading standards in the sample schools

15. In 1996, *The teaching of reading* drew attention to 'some schools and pupils [who] are doing well against the odds while others in similar circumstances are not'. This is still the case. To explore why apparently similar schools vary in their effectiveness, this survey focused, in the main, on schools at the extremes: those achieving very high standards in reading compared to those in similar circumstances and those where standards were low (compared to similar schools) and showing little improvement.

16. Effectiveness in teaching reading, as measured by schools' success at the end of Key Stage 1 assessments in 2003, varied significantly between schools which were contextually very similar. A comparison of effective and ineffective schools - characteristics and attainment - is illustrated in the two tables shown below. School A is an effective school in terms of its success in teaching reading; school B is ineffective.

Characteristics	School A 'effective'	School B 'ineffective'
Location and context	Residential London outskirts. Very varied social, cultural and economic context	Socially diverse residential area in South Yorkshire
Number of pupils on roll	233	253
Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM	20%	20%
Percentage of pupils learning EAL	12%	0%
Percentage of pupils known to have SEN	17.5%	17.4%
Pupils' attainment on entry to the Reception year	Broadly average	Broadly average
Other details		Additional staffing provided through Excellence in Cities

% of pupils attaining each level in the 2003 Key Stage 1 reading tests	School A	School B
Working towards Level 1 (W)	0	4
Level 1	4	24
Level 2C	4	0
Level 2B	14	24
Level 2A	21	36
Level 3	57	12
Attainment compared to the national average	A*	E
Attainment compared to similar schools, based on FSM	A*	D

17. Most of the schools deemed to be effective in the sample had an average points score of A or A* for reading in the Performance and Assessment (PANDA) reports produced by Ofsted when compared to similar schools. Few pupils in these schools attained less than level 2, the nationally expected level at the end of Key Stage 1. In these schools, the proportion of pupils securely gaining level 2 or above in reading ranged from 55% to 96%. Some schools regularly had more than 90% of their pupils gaining level 2B at the end of Key Stage 1. In nearly one in five of these schools, more than 60% of the pupils achieved level 3, and these standards had been sustained over several years.

18. The effective schools were not necessarily those with few pupils eligible for FSMs, with EAL or with SEN. For example, a school where over 26% of the pupils were eligible for FSMs had improved its average points score from 13.1 to 17.9 in four years, thus moving its comparative grade from E to A at the end of Key Stage 1. Not only were these effective schools achieving high standards, but they were also making significant progress in narrowing the gap between the highest and lowest attaining pupils.

19. In the ineffective schools, attainment was frequently skewed downwards and there had been little real progress in improving reading. In some of them, standards in reading (as measured by the tests) were declining rather than improving, despite the NLS. Many of them regularly had more than 30% of pupils who did not achieve the expected level (level 2) in reading at the end of Key Stage 1 and only one in four had more than 30% of pupils gaining level 3.

20. In this sample, although the schools attaining a low average point score at the end of Key Stage 1 were more likely to be those where the FSM percentage was above 25%, this was not always so.

Pupils' reading skills and strategies

21. Most pupils from the early days in the Reception year (Year R) were learning how to match sounds and letters and to identify the initial phonemes¹ in words. Pupils in the effective schools went on to acquire a broad range of phonic knowledge and learnt the skills to apply it. They recognised common digraphs,² for example, and were able to blend phonemes together to read whole words. By the end of Key Stage 1, higher attaining pupils in both the effective and ineffective schools had secure phonic knowledge and skills which they used successfully to read unfamiliar words. Their success contributed to their confidence and positive attitudes. They were also usually able to talk about their own strategies - in other words, they had an explicit awareness of how to approach an unknown or difficult word:

I break the word into little bits and then read it quickly from the beginning. I pulled 'polished' out all in a string to make the right word and for 'personages', I squashed 'person' and 'ages' together.

Year 3 pupil: working at level 3

22. In the ineffective schools, however, many pupils in Years 2 and 3 who found it difficult to learn to read had

inadequate phonic knowledge and skills. They struggled in using phonics beyond initial letter sounds. They often knew that they had to sound out the individual letters (or groups of letters), but they did not have the skills to blend sounds together to produce the correct word. They were frequently frustrated by their inability to link letters and phonemes and to begin to decode unfamiliar words independently. They had not learnt phonics quickly enough and their recognition of words on sight was also poor. An inspector recorded:

I pick up the book and ask if we can read this one together. He hesitates and looks away, turning his face. He picks up the book a few minutes later and tries to read the title. He spells the word and sounds out each letter but cannot blend them. He is frustrated and says 'I don't know the cover, how can I read it?'. I introduce the book to him and read the first two pages with him, asking him to continue. He scans the page and uses the initial letter sound to guess a word which matches the pictures. He has poor phonic knowledge and guesses wildly. This is hindering his efforts and his frustration is visible. He gives up and says that he is rubbish and can never read.

Year 3 pupil: working at level 1

23. Although pupils who used phonics well could decode unfamiliar vocabulary, such knowledge and skills did not always help them to understand what they were reading. Occasionally, they relied too heavily on their phonic knowledge and became over-confident that they recognised a word before they had reached the end of it. However, because they did not take account of all the letters, and because they failed to check that the word made sense, they produced words which were phonically and graphically similar to the word on the page but which either did not make sense - for example, reading 'suppose' for 'support' - or were misleading. They did not consider other strategies to check and confirm accuracy with miscues often going unnoticed. Where there was an over reliance on phonics as the principal reading strategy, pupils

¹ The smallest unit of sound in a word which is represented by one or more letters: to, shoe, through.

² Two letters representing one phoneme: bath, train.

could usually read the words but could not always explain their meaning. When asked what the unfamiliar word might mean, such pupils failed to check the word within its context and often looked to an adult for the answer. This illustrates vividly the importance of reading all the letters in a word.

24. In the most effective schools, pupils used their phonic knowledge initially to attempt unfamiliar words, for example 'brilliant', and they used other cues and strategies to check the meaning. They used illustrations, re-read sentences or glanced back at the previous paragraph to confirm that the word was accurate within the context of what they were reading. They also had an acute awareness of other decoding and spelling strategies.

A Year 1 boy, working at level 1, looked at the word 'what' and said to the inspector: 'My mum says, if you think it's "swat", it's "what".'

25. In the effective schools, this was true as much for low attaining pupils as it was for the fluent readers. Consequently, they understood and could usually explain what was happening in the text.
26. Headteachers in the most effective schools recognised the importance of introducing pupils early to a broader range of reading strategies alongside phonics. Many saw the early introduction of the NLS's reading 'searchlights' model as a way of broadening pupils' strategies, which enabled them to read not only accurately but also with understanding and enjoyment. One headteacher said:

We try to teach all the reading skills from the word 'go' - then you are building upon existing foundations, not changing the architecture halfway through the house.

27. As a result of the direct teaching of information skills, linked to the NLS framework for teaching, most pupils had developed appropriate skills in using information books. They had learnt some of the key features of non-fiction

texts, including alphabetical order within the index. Higher attaining pupils used both the contents and the index to locate information they needed to answer questions and used a glossary to find the meanings of 'tricky words'. Lower attaining pupils often had a basic knowledge of these features, but they had insufficient opportunity to use it; as a result, they lacked confidence. Few pupils in Years 3 and 4 could scan texts for key words to help them to find detailed information.

28. Most of the schools in the survey - but by no means all - had libraries with classified collections of non-fiction for pupils to use. Only a few schools in the survey taught pupils directly how to use the library. In these schools, libraries were well organised, books were classified effectively and loans were managed through information and communication technology (ICT) which pupils knew how to use. Generally, schools gave too little time to teaching library skills. Most pupils said they could not recall being taught how to use their library as a way to find information. Pupils with such skills had often gained them elsewhere, regularly visiting public libraries outside school.
29. Even in some of the most effective schools, although able pupils in Years 3 and 4 used non-fiction texts confidently in the classroom, they knew little about how to find information in the library and had had little experience of doing so. In part, this was because teachers had often drawn together smaller selections of books to support research in classrooms. This helped pupils by matching a small selection of books closely to their needs, but reduced their opportunities to learn and apply library skills. An inspector recorded:

He has good alphabetical knowledge. He looks at the first and second letters in the word and locates the word quickly in the dictionary. He knows the difference between non-fiction and fiction, and how to use a glossary and index. His retrieval of information is quick and he is very good at summarising what he has read. However, he has poor knowledge of the library. He cannot find a book

about plants. He is unsure what a catalogue is and has no way of retrieving a book from the library other than looking at shelf after shelf. He indicates that he goes to the library to use ICT but not to use books.

Year 3 pupil: working within level 3

Pupils' attitudes

30. By the age of seven, many high attaining pupils were already avid readers with positive attitudes. They talked of becoming engrossed in books and drew on their wide reading to discuss their preferences.

I read my dad's newspaper because I like to know what is going on.

I like fiction because it gives you things you may not have thought of and words that you may never use. It helps me dream about things.

They talked about their favourite authors, mentioned their preferences in terms of books 'with adventure' or 'funny books' and, generally, saw reading as pleasurable, both at school and at home.

She quickly began reading her book, using various voices for the characters. She chuckled to herself at the humour, talking confidently about the characters in the book. 'The teacher in the book is very strict but Bernie is grumpy.' When asked to explain how she knows Bernie is grumpy, she finds the words in the text and summarises why. She says that she reads all the time at home. Her mum and dad read to her and ask questions and give her quizzes. 'It's brilliant. We play "Who wants to be a millionaire?" when I am reading.'

Year 2 pupil: working within level 3

31. Teachers' influence in introducing pupils to new texts and authors was significant. Pupils enjoyed being read to and responded very positively to the regular reading of class novels.

I chose this book because I like his (the author's) stories. I find them funny. Our teacher has read some of his books at story time and I saw this one on the shelf and thought it would be good.

On the net, I read lyrics of songs. Our teacher gave us a website about Victorians and showed us how to find information on it. I like finding out and have been on it at home.

32. Although most of the higher attaining pupils read a great deal at home, some did not regard this as learning to read. Some pupils distinguished clearly between 'school reading books' which were 'mostly stories' and their real passion for reading non-fiction at home.

Pupils talk of taking their reading books home each week but they appear to lack interest and several indicate that they read their book only occasionally. When asked what they read at home, some indicate they have a shelf 'full of books' but that some of these are too hard. However, when comics are mentioned by one boy, there is a significant change in response, with boys particularly excitable and dominating discussion on the wider range of material they read outside school. They talk of reading 'facts', football magazines and 'football skills' books and playing 'Top Trumps' games with their friends. One talks of reading a weekly magazine which is helping him to build a remote control car.

Discussion with a group of Y3 pupils

33. Most schools used books from a range of structured reading schemes as a central resource. Higher attaining pupils described how they had read these quickly and were then able to choose freely from books that particularly appealed to them. In contrast, those who struggled were usually reading books from a tightly structured scheme and stayed with the scheme for longer. In many schools, pupils saw this as something to be worked through until they became a 'free reader'. One low-attaining pupil commented: 'You go up a colour if you're good and down a

colour if you're doing rubbish.'

34. Although structured reading scheme texts were usually complemented by a broader range of material, lower attaining pupils often found that books they really wanted to read were too difficult. Schools also believed that while the quality and quantity of reading materials had improved recently, there were still too few suitable books for low-attaining pupils, particularly in Key Stage 2. The books they were able to read often had an interest level that was well below them:

My book just has 'Look. Look!' in it. (He rolls his eyes.) What use is that? It is too easy.

Year 3 pupil: working within level 1

35. Almost all pupils in the most effective schools had some freedom to choose their own books, graded at appropriate reading levels. Their choices were usually monitored by teachers who also suggested new books and authors as a means of broadening their reading. As a result, pupils of all abilities were widening their knowledge of genre and their reading interests, increasing their vocabulary and developing confidence. They seldom saw reading as a race towards becoming 'free readers'.
36. However, in some schools, even able readers were restricted by the school's policy to follow the structure of the reading scheme. This did little to encourage positive attitudes or help them to see reading as a way of developing their personal interests.

She considers herself a good reader 'at times' and enjoys reading at home to her mum and dad. She talks of reading books with chapters in them. However, she says that at school she has to read the reading scheme books. They are boring at times but she takes them home and finishes them over a couple of days. However, she is frustrated that she has to wait a week to change the book 'because you can only change it on a Tuesday'.

Year 2 higher attaining pupil

37. In the effective schools, many low attaining readers knew that they were making progress and learning to read independently. In many cases, their positive attitudes were nurtured by feedback which assured them that they were making progress and praise that they were learning to read independently. Teaching assistants and volunteer reading helpers provided good support and developed positive relationships which increased pupils' self esteem. Effective intervention programmes were often successful in reversing negative attitudes because pupils gained the skills they needed, recognised the swift progress they were making and were motivated to improve further.

38. However, lack of competence often led to negative attitudes. For low-attaining pupils, these were reinforced by the lack of independence they had to select books. Since a book was often chosen for them rather than with them, they saw reading simply as a chore:

He reads the title and moves straight into the book. When asked who wrote it, he says he doesn't know. When his attention is drawn to the names on the front cover and he is asked again, he points to the illustrator. He is not able to predict, from the cover, what the book might be about. He recognises some of the characters on the cover as being characters in the reading scheme. He points them out, states their names and says that the book is all about them. He quickly wants to move on. 'Shall I read it now? How many pages do you want me to read?'

Year 2 pupil: working at level 2c

As these pupils failed to make the necessary progress, the gap between their reading and that of their peers widened and their negative attitudes hardened.

39. Pupils valued the opportunities and resources some schools provided for personal reading within and beyond the curriculum. For example, pupils contributed to their own reading records and involved themselves in surveys to identify their favourite books. The results were publicised and informed the purchase of new books. In one school,

pupil librarians were responsible for the new purchases, displaying the books, highlighting 'The author of the week' and helping other pupils. Pupils also responded enthusiastically to libraries and reading clubs:

A breakfast reading club provided opportunities for extended reading, access to good quality resources and the support of teaching assistants. Pupils browsed freely and read with concentration. Teachers and other staff supported individuals and listened to them read. Pupils read books from their classroom library, magazines or books they had brought from home.

Reluctant readers

40. Very few schools had identified reluctance to read for pleasure and enjoyment as a problem. Even if they had - and some headteachers and SEN co-ordinators saw it as a problem - few had successful strategies to overcome it.

41. Reluctance to read was not confined only to lower-attaining pupils. On the contrary, reluctant readers could sometimes read very well but were not motivated by the reading materials available in school. When talking about his own reading interests, for instance, one boy said he could read well but did not read his school book at home and seldom read to his parents.

He indicates that he doesn't really like books. He chooses books in school, but they are mostly stories. He admits that he has a number of books at home in his bedroom, but that most are too hard. However, he talks about the 'Rocket' magazine he gets and indicates that he is particularly interested in rockets and space. He relates enthusiastically two interesting facts he has recently found out about space and planets. When asked about the book he used to find the information, he smiles and talks about the websites he used and his CD-Rom encyclopaedia. He says that he much prefers to use the computer to find out information.

Year 3 pupil

42. Schools seldom used the broader range of material pupils read at home as a starting point to further their reading in school and improve their motivation. In addition, when pupils read their books in the reading lessons and read well, teachers rarely considered the reasons why they were not reading the books at home or choosing to read when opportunities arose. Teachers did not always identify their lack of enthusiasm for reading. Consequently, their reluctance was rarely tackled effectively.

He has a good knowledge of the story and can explain some of the key features of adventure stories. He reads confidently and quickly predicts what will happen to the main character in the story at least four pages before it happens. It is clear that he has already scanned the book and has a good understanding of what will happen. He says that he can take books home to read if he wants but does not as he has his own books. 'I don't read very much.' However, he talks confidently about information he has gained from his own books on flight and aeroplanes, and of the magazines he gets each week. The headteacher reports that the boy is 'mad about aeroplanes' and smiles at the comment about not reading. However, the point is missed that the books available in school may not be capturing his interest.

Year 2 able reader

43. The quality of resources to interest boys and low-attaining readers was often raised as a difficulty. Although most schools had reviewed their book stock, few had gone much further than identifying books which they felt would interest boys. However, pupils were rarely consulted about the sorts of books to be included. One boy, a reluctant reader, said of the collections in his school, 'They just have sport and science fiction in. I'm not interested in sport or science fiction'.

Leadership and management

44. The quality of the leadership and management of reading was at least good in 21 of the 24 effective schools. It was

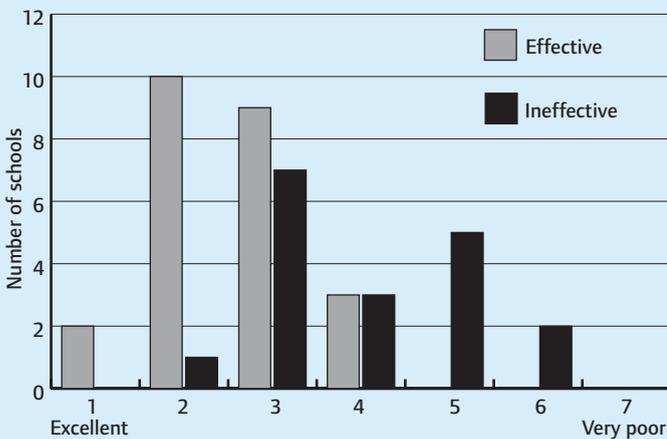


Figure 1. Quality of leadership and management

very good or excellent in half and never less than satisfactory. In the 18 ineffective schools, it was at least good in eight, unsatisfactory in seven and poor in two.

45. Where leadership and management were unsatisfactory, attainment in reading in the survey schools was always low. However, low standards did not necessarily mean that leadership and management were weak. In some schools with low standards, including those with newly appointed headteachers, they and their leadership teams were working successfully against the odds and were beginning to improve achievement.

46. In the effective schools, headteachers, leadership teams and other key staff such as co-ordinators for literacy and SEN worked strategically and collaboratively to raise standards, improve provision and solve problems. Their leadership was:

- purposeful, focusing intently on making sure that every single pupil was successful in learning to read
- well-informed in that their decisions and actions derived from high quality professional knowledge about how to teach reading
- creative and challenging, questioning practice and provision and being unafraid to make changes.

47. Successful schools invariably used a range of initiatives to improve reading standards and to develop positive attitudes

towards reading. Effective leadership ensured that these individual initiatives were drawn together as a whole-school approach, complementing rather than duplicating each other. All staff knew what was expected of them and how each initiative worked. There was effective communication and, when one approach did not meet the needs of some pupils, staff knew the range of alternatives available to them and the next steps to take. Links between teaching, assessment and intervention were seamless. The whole-school approach to teaching reading was consistently applied.

48. Almost all schools used the NLS framework of objectives and accompanying guidance as the core of their approach to teaching reading. The most successful schools went beyond this and used every opportunity across the curriculum to teach reading. The approach was cohesive and built on a secure knowledge of the needs of individual pupils. There was no hiding place for underachievement.

Role of the headteacher

49. Many schools used expert staff to ensure that individual initiatives succeeded. However, in the schools where standards were particularly high compared to similar schools or where significant progress had been made, the headteacher's role was vital. They had a clear vision for the teaching of reading, set high aspirations for all pupils and staff, knew exactly what was happening in their schools and were enthusiastic about reading. They ensured that it was not just one of several priorities, but that reading competence and confidence were principal aims. One said she was 'passionate' about reading; another, that it 'was taken seriously from day one'.

50. They put their vision into practice through:
- involving themselves actively in teaching and assessing reading
 - monitoring assessment data and following up actions which had been agreed
 - collaborating with co-ordinators, other teachers and support staff, parents and outside agencies.

51. *The teaching of reading* reported that, in the schools with good leadership, 'the headteachers were not only knowledgeable about the teaching of reading, but also very clear in their overall assessment of the school's strengths and weaknesses in reading. These heads were actively involved in curricular issues'. This was borne out strongly in this survey.

52. Three case studies illustrate headteachers' successful leadership and management.

Case study: tackling underachievement

When the headteacher took up her appointment, 75 of the school's 210 pupils were listed on the school's register of pupils with SEN. Five years later, the figure was only 14. She introduced a system for tracking pupils' performance. Each year, the assessment co-ordinator gave teachers written details of individual pupils' progress against the targets which had been set for them. Analysis of their progress sometimes resulted in identifying what the school called 'sliders' - pupils who were not making the expected progress. The senior management team (SMT) monitored these pupils carefully - fewer than five in each year group - and discussed them each half-term. The headteacher and the co-ordinator met weekly to monitor progress in reading, particularly that of the 'sliders'. They also regularly listened to pupils reading - again, especially the 'sliders'. Teachers were required to make weekly notes about their progress for the SMT's meeting. The very able pupils were also monitored to ensure that they were achieving all they could. Standards improved to a much better level than the school had hoped for, as a result of the tracking and effective intervention.

Case study: improving transition

In a primary school working on a split site, the headteacher had a very clear knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses in the teaching of reading on the Key Stage 1 site, borne out by

thorough analysis of assessment information. Data showed some pupils struggled to cope with the greater emphasis on reading comprehension as they moved into Key Stage 2. He deployed the literacy co-ordinator to Key Stage 1 so that she might demonstrate the teaching of a broader range of reading strategies than were then being used. Her support for her colleagues improved continuity in teaching reading across the two key stages and reduced the problems that pupils faced on transition.

Case study: developing boys' positive attitudes

The headteacher's monitoring revealed that boys did not read at home, they lacked role models and they did not know which books to select. The school therefore focused on developing their attitudes to reading and improving their achievement. The headteacher and deputy implemented reading activity clubs at lunch time, designed to develop positive attitudes. The boys began to show greater interest in reading. They selected from a broader range of material and were more confident in discussing their reading. Boys also ran a book swap club in Key Stage 2, a deliberate move by the deputy head to motivate them. Book reviews by boys were shared with their peer group and were displayed in the library. A book week included two invited authors talking about their work. The boys were particularly enthusiastic about this, responding well to the authors as positive role models. The school also introduced extra guided reading groups for Year 6 boys, led by the headteacher and deputy. Before this, discussions were held with the parents of those concerned and contracts drawn up which outlined the school's role and that expected of the parents. Of the twelve pupils involved during the year, only one parent failed to support the school, and all the other pupils made significant progress in reading. The programme's success was evaluated and extended to Year 2 pupils.

53. In the effective schools in particular, strong leadership was complemented by good management which had a positive impact on provision.

Case study: improving guided reading

In one school, some teachers found guided reading difficult to manage and teach, so the headteacher and senior staff provided support. The school bought a broad range of texts for guided reading to make its organisation and preparation easier for teachers. The texts were classified according to reading difficulty and their appropriateness for teaching particular reading strategies. Linked ICT resources were also bought for independent follow-up activities. The literacy co-ordinator and key staff prepared questions and support materials and reorganised the curriculum to create discrete time for guided reading when teaching assistants were available. The school sought the support of parents and volunteer reading helpers for guided reading. There was a willingness to be creative and to review established patterns of working. As a result of the guidance and resources, teachers taught guided reading more effectively.

54. Very good management comprised:

- rigorous self-evaluation which appraised practice and provision
- purposeful use of data, deriving from monitoring, assessment and testing
- intervention where pupils were not making sufficient progress and evaluation of its impact
- performance management reviews and curriculum monitoring which fed into professional development
- effective training and deployment of teachers, teaching assistants and other adults which helped to promote consistent approaches to teaching, as well as improving the adults' knowledge and understanding
- good communication, especially with parents, which improved the support for pupils.

Tackling underachievement

55. One of the clear differences between the effective and ineffective schools in teaching reading lay in the way in which they tackled poor achievement. The effective schools were honest with themselves about where they were failing and tackled their weaknesses and problems knowledgeably. The ineffective schools, however, often existed within a culture of blame. Almost always, when discussing their reading standards with inspectors, they looked outside the school for the source of their difficulties, frequently blaming parents, but failing to act decisively and strategically to tackle the problems. Sometimes, they cited their own approach to inclusion as working against them:

We are a victim of our own success in attracting pupils with SEN from outside the catchment area, thereby reducing the results at the end of the key stage.

We have a high number of SEN pupils in each class, particularly emotional and behavioural difficulties, which take up a lot of the time and energy of class teachers.

56. Ineffective schools saw these issues as obstacles that could not be altered rather than challenges that could be overcome. The most successful schools did not. They identified the needs of pupils early and provided the appropriate support and intervention to build their self-esteem and to teach the skills they needed to learn. Pupils recognised that they were making progress, and this often generated the motivation to improve further.

57. Bound up with a culture of low expectations and failure to act was their lack of an overall strategy to tackle the problems. When ineffective schools took action, it was often a one-off event, one of a list of unrelated tasks which the school felt needed to be done. However, such actions were often superseded by new ones. As a result, implementation faltered, weakening the potential of any initiative.

58. The effective schools, on the other hand, worked strategically, keeping in mind a clearly communicated, long-term goal. Their actions comprised:
- systematic and focused monitoring
 - evaluation of the findings and, where relevant, discussion with the whole staff and others involved
 - agreed actions and training
 - evaluation of the success (or otherwise) of what had been done.
59. This case study shows how one school worked against the odds to raise the achievement of its pupils.

Case study: raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils

Over 95% of the pupils came from minority ethnic families, 95% spoke EAL and over one third of the pupils were entitled to FSM. Extended leave abroad was frequent. Social and cultural deprivation seriously inhibited pupils' comprehension, understanding of context and use of vocabulary. Parents were often unable, rather than unwilling, to support their children at home, especially during Key Stage 2.

The school established predicted attainment from baseline data as well as specific targets for the National Curriculum levels which might be expected at the end of each year. A range of data, including standardised tests, teacher assessment and the tracking of pupils' phonic knowledge and skills, were used to identify pupils who were underachieving and to establish sets for teaching. The school therefore had a very good knowledge of pupils' progress and achievement. The headteacher was committed to raising standards and took active steps to achieve this, such as placing her two strongest teachers in Year 3 to prevent a dip from Year 2 to Year 3. As a result, the school created a positive model of learning and achievement at the beginning of Key Stage 2 to underpin work in the rest of the key stage.

Leading and managing teaching

60. Consistent, agreed approaches to teaching reading were the hallmarks of the effective schools. This meant more than written policies: it meant that pupils actually experienced consistency as they moved from class to class. Many of the ineffective schools had policies, but gaps between policy and practice were marked. As *The teaching of reading* put it: 'The lack of clear organisational structures led to inconsistencies within the school of which the headteachers often appeared to be unaware'. This was still the case in this survey, despite the implementation of the NLS. In some schools, headteachers appeared to condone inconsistency, believing that decisions about teaching reading were best left to individual teachers.
61. The headteachers of the ineffective schools did not always know enough about how reading was taught, assessed and monitored in their own schools. One headteacher, when asked by an inspector for some samples of pupils' reading records, said, 'I'll go and find out what they do'. Some lacked a first-hand overview and a clear understanding of how pupils learned to read. They relied on others to keep them informed but, because their own confidence and knowledge were insecure, they were uncertain which, of a variety of different initiatives, might be the most appropriate.
62. There were particular disjunctions in the ineffective schools between the work of both English and SEN co-ordinators and the work done in the rest of the school. In some schools, it was as if SEN co-ordinators had been left to 'get on with it', divorced from the practice elsewhere. Underlying this was a simple failure by headteachers to manage all the provision, to give a clear sense of direction and to make decisions. This was convincingly illustrated in an ineffective school where the teaching of phonics was excellent in the Year R/1 class, unsatisfactory in the mixed-age Year 1/2 class and poor in the intervention sessions taught by the SEN co-ordinator:

The one-to-one work with a Year 3 pupil consisted mainly of playing I-Spy with coloured plastic letters. The SEN co-ordinator and the pupil took this in turns. One said, 'I spy with my little eye a blue letter that makes the sound /h/'; the other gave the word. They worked through the whole alphabet in turn which took considerable time. The co-ordinator corrected the pupil when he gave the name of the letter and not the sound. However, he already seemed to know the names of the letters and sounds they represented. This was inefficient teaching, made worse by the lack of direct instruction, and the pupil failed to learn anything new.

63. The failures in management were as significant as the weaknesses in the teaching. The headteacher had not capitalised on the excellent subject knowledge of the Year R/1 teacher who had been given neither the opportunity nor encouragement to influence the teaching in the rest of the school. The failure to make best use of an excellent teacher had a negative impact on the overall quality and consistency of the teaching and the standards achieved.

64. In its final report, the Literacy Task Force set out the characteristics which it saw as 'crucially important in creating the setting for the development of literacy'. All the findings of this survey support that list, especially the need for 'a well-informed headteacher who understands the central principles of effective approaches to literacy, sets high expectations and provides consistent leadership'.

Quality of the teaching of reading

65. Overall, the quality of the teaching of reading was at least good in over half the lessons, satisfactory in about a quarter, but unsatisfactory in the rest. The best teaching was in the Foundation Stage where three quarters of lessons were taught effectively. Teaching was better at Key Stage 1 than at Key Stage 2. It was at least good in nearly two thirds of lessons at Key Stage 1, but in only a half at Key Stage 2.

66. The quality of teaching varied in both the effective and ineffective schools, but in the effective schools, the great majority of the teaching was at least satisfactory and much of it was good. Headteachers were usually aware of any weaknesses and they provided appropriate support to improve it. In addition, whole-school systems helped to reduce the impact of unsatisfactory teaching and ensured continuity between classes.

67. Although there were examples of excellent and very good teaching in the schools where attainment was low, there was more unsatisfactory teaching in these schools overall, as well as more inconsistency from class to class. This meant that pupils were likely to make uneven progress.

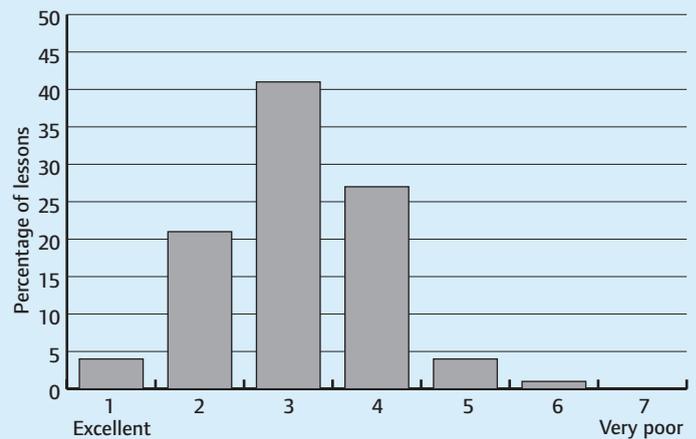


Figure 2. Quality of teaching in schools with high attainment compared to similar schools

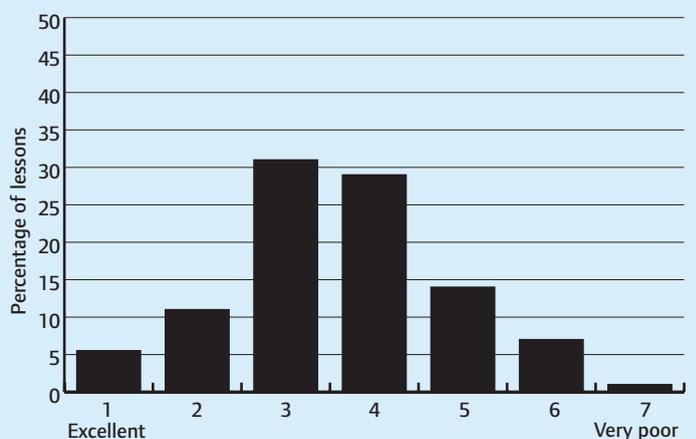


Figure 3. Quality of teaching in schools with low attainment compared with similar schools

68. The most effective teaching included:

- the systematic daily teaching of phonics
- the teaching of other strategies for decoding
- a whole-school approach to the explicit teaching of comprehension
- accurate assessment of pupils' reading ability
- planning which built on earlier assessments
- high expectations of pupils
- carefully selected texts to match pupils' reading levels
- effective use of other resources, including other staff and volunteers.

Teaching of phonics and other decoding strategies

69. Almost all the schools recognised the value of teaching phonics. This marks a clear shift in teaching reading since the publication of *The teaching of reading* which reported that:

A significant omission in much of the work seen was the systematic teaching of an effective programme of phonic knowledge and skills. ... It was an effective component of Reading Recovery sessions, but too often featured as a 'last resort' for pupils with reading difficulties rather than a 'first resort' for all pupils.

70. The effective schools had a coherent approach to teaching phonics which included the rapid early coverage of grapheme/phoneme correspondences. Phonics was a regular, daily part of teaching reading. Sessions were short, but the teaching was well informed, was conducted at a brisk pace, built on what pupils already knew and developed their confidence. Phonics formed an important part of the teaching of reading in the early years. Effective, timely intervention strategies were in place for pupils with particular weaknesses in phonic knowledge or skills, continuing into Key Stage 2 where necessary.

71. Schools generally used the NLS's guidance, *Progression in phonics*, for teaching phonics, although some used other published schemes. In some lessons, teachers made excellent use of commercial schemes in which the phoneme

to be learnt was accompanied by an action, such as pretending to put up an umbrella when the vowel sound /u/ was introduced. Where phonics was taught effectively, teachers and support staff understood the importance of articulating phonemes correctly and encouraged their pupils to do the same. Instructions such as, 'Feel your tongue on the back of your teeth' and 'Make your lips like a fish' helped very young pupils to articulate the consonants /t/ and /d/ correctly.

72. In some schools, the teaching was too slow and not systematic enough to help pupils to make sufficient progress. Even though schemes and guidance structured the teaching of phonic knowledge and skills, schools lacked a clear rationale for teaching them and so teachers were unclear about what their pupils should learn each day. There were low expectations in some schools: for example, teachers were not convinced that pupils could learn more than one sound each week. Consequently, they did not teach pupils vowel digraphs or consonant clusters early enough. This was a particular disadvantage for more able pupils. Teachers' own lack of knowledge and understanding sometimes confused pupils. For example, one teacher demonstrated to pupils how to represent the phoneme /b/ by writing the letter 'b' in the air but, because she was facing them, the pupils heard the sound /b/ but saw her writing the letter 'd'. Their confusion was evident in their subsequent work.

73. In the effective schools, teachers introduced a broad range of reading strategies early on to support pupils' decoding and understanding. They taught pupils to recognise whole words where these were not phonically regular and to use grammar to support comprehension. Some teachers were particularly skilful in using resources, such as puppets, to reinforce previous learning and to introduce new ideas, such as learning 'tricky words'. Teachers taught such decoding strategies explicitly and reminded pupils of them. In a Year 1 lesson, for example, the teacher asked, 'What do we do when we come to a word that we don't know?' Pupils' responses included 'Sound it out,' 'Go back to the beginning,' 'Miss the word out and read on'. Pupils used

these well when reading aloud: a boy, using context as a cue, said, 'I could read the sentence and think what the word might be, because I know what the sentence is trying to say'. Such teaching, alongside the direct teaching of phonics, ensured that young and lower-attaining pupils were making full use of the skills and strategies they had learnt. This was in stark contrast to pupils in another school who did not know how to tackle new words. In one instance, an inspector asked a pupil in Year 1 what he did when he met a word he didn't know. His answer, 'Change my book', revealed that he lacked knowledge, motivation and confidence.

Teaching comprehension

74. The teaching of comprehension was included in the curriculum of all the schools visited. In the effective schools, the early introduction of a broad range of reading strategies was inextricably linked to the aim of engaging pupils in reading with understanding. The good teaching was guided by a coherent school policy to promote pupils' conceptual development and understanding.

Case study: teaching comprehension

In one school, pupils entered with limited vocabulary and weaknesses in communication, language and literacy. The headteacher was keen to ensure that pupils understood what they read so, even before they could read the text, teachers and other staff taught comprehension skills directly through regular speaking and listening activities, beginning in the nursery. All staff understood this policy and implemented it effectively.

In the Reception class, for example, a teaching assistant used a story about young owls to teach early inferential skills to a group of able pupils. She questioned their literal understanding, but soon moved on to more abstract themes. Questions such as 'What makes you think it's winter?', 'How do you know where mummy has gone?' and 'What are the babies scared of?' elicited good responses. The

teaching assistant encouraged them to answer in sentences and then went on to draw their attention to the importance of the text. To test their comprehension, she asked pupils to put up their hand when they heard a scary word or point to the sentence which showed how the owl was feeling, and noted their responses.

She had a clear rationale that all the higher-order comprehension skills should be introduced early, using simple whole texts. She knew that, as pupils grew older, they would be asked to refer to the text to justify their opinion. She was convinced of the benefit of teaching this appropriately in the Foundation Stage.

75. In the ineffective schools, although comprehension was part of the reading curriculum, it was taught less frequently as a specific set of hierarchical skills. In some lessons, teachers used written comprehension exercises simply as a time-filler.

76. A few of the most effective schools taught comprehension successfully through other subjects, usually in the humanities. In these lessons, pupils made good progress in understanding texts because they saw a genuine purpose for their reading. In an infant school, pupils were studying the life of Mary Seacole and Florence Nightingale. To help pupils to undertake their own research, the teacher had carefully drawn together a range of resources including books, posters and historical documents that all pupils could use. The resources were supported with key questions, and helpful additional support for low-attaining pupils. Resources were sufficient to provide all pupils with a suitable range to meet their reading abilities and also enabled them to seek information from more than one source.

Guided reading

77. Many, but not all, schools used the NLS's materials to teach guided reading. The quality of teaching in these

sessions, whether within or outside the literacy hour, was related directly to teachers' understanding of this approach. The successful sessions showed clearly the principles of guided reading in action: drawing pupils' attention to strategies for decoding, making objectives explicit, guiding pupils to apply key strategies in their independent reading, and assessing individuals as they read. However, too many teachers taught guided reading ineffectively and it became little more than pupils reading around the group in turn.

78. In the successful sessions, texts were chosen at a level that enabled pupils to read between 90% and 94% of the text accurately, independently and with understanding. At the beginning, teachers reviewed the reading strategies that pupils would need. During this 'strategy check', they reminded pupils of what they had learned last time and of the strategies that they already knew. They introduced the objective, illustrated it by referring to the text and indicated the sorts of questions which might be asked. In one school with particularly effective practice, a group of Year 2 pupils of average ability were taught as part of a guided reading group:

The session was organised very effectively. Each group had clear tasks related to their reading targets. The teacher focused on comprehension and, through good initial questioning, ensured that pupils thought about which strategies would be the most useful to them. She began with a short review of spelling patterns, linked to the group's work on spelling books, using words from the story and pupils' individual whiteboards to check their understanding. After the book was introduced, pupils were given an independent reading task and a time was set for them by which they should have read a particular section.

The teacher listened in turn to pupils reading individually. She suggested good support strategies when pupils struggled, such as, 'Run your finger under the whole word'. If decoding was the problem,

she emphasised phonics; if understanding, she suggested using the sentence and the broader context of the story. Good focused questions monitored pupils' understanding. For example, with the suffix '-ed', the teacher asked, 'Does this mean that something is happening now, or had it already happened?' Pupils concentrated intently on the vocabulary and detail of the text and were encouraged to explain their ideas. Overall, they made very good progress in a short time.

79. Apart from this clear, structured teaching, the teacher also ensured that the other groups, which she was not teaching directly, received support and made progress.

80. In the ineffective schools, the planning and teaching of guided reading was unsatisfactory in a third of lessons. It took too little account of the needs of other groups in the class and the tasks set for them lacked challenge. In some instances, particularly in Key Stage 2, pupils were left to their own devices to read silently or share books. Although some enjoyed the opportunity, others merely flicked through their books with little apparent interest.

Planning, assessment and recording

81. The planning and assessment of reading were mostly good in the effective schools. Clear, whole-school systems contributed to the quality. In the ineffective schools,

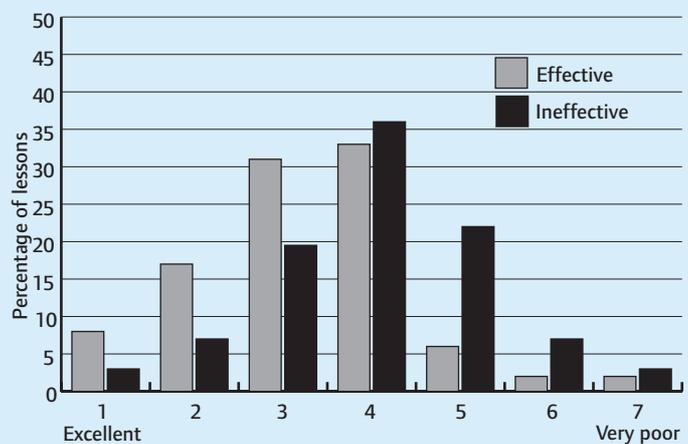


Figure 4. Quality of planning and assessment

however, although excellent planning and assessment happened in a few classes, they were seldom disseminated effectively, leading to varying quality from class to class and, overall, to unsatisfactory provision.

82. In the effective schools, assessment was systematic from admission to transfer. A range of assessments took place from simple question and answer sessions to test pupils' understanding to standardised reading tests to measure progress. The effective schools identified weaknesses in reading urgently and provided early and relevant support before the gap between low-attaining pupils and their peers became too wide and began to damage pupils' self-esteem.

83. Coherent guidance set out a hierarchy of reading skills for teachers to consider when they assessed pupils. Some planning included key questions to inform assessment but, even if teachers' planning did not identify specific questions, they knew intuitively which questions to ask to assess understanding. The most effective questions matched the range of ability in the class, required pupils to think hard, to justify their opinions and to explain what they understood. Questioning was also effective when teachers gave pupils enough time to think before replying and when misconceptions were dealt with immediately. In these lessons, there was also an effective balance between the amount of talk by adults and responses from the pupils. In weaker lessons, the talk was dominated by adults with few opportunities for the pupils to contribute their ideas and opinions.

84. Some teachers provided constructive oral feedback to their pupils during lessons. Such remarks as 'Well done, you remembered that the book starts at the front; now show me the first word' (Nursery), 'That was clear and accurate, but I was hoping to hear the Tiger's voice' (Year 2) and 'You're right, but where in the text is your evidence that shows us how Muggle Wump feels?' (Year 4) not only praised pupils' efforts, but also added extra challenge. Some of the best feedback referred to pupils' current reading targets, reminding them gently of what they were aiming for next.

85. Teaching assistants contributed effectively by re-phrasing a teacher's questions or by simultaneously translating them for pupils for whom English was an additional language. In the best lessons, they assessed reading skills accurately and jotted down pertinent information for the teacher.

Although they often held useful and important information about pupils' reading skills, it was rare for them to contribute formally to school records.

Reading records

86. Reading records were one of the weakest aspects of teaching reading. In some cases, they were little more than a list of books or a form of bookmark where pupils recorded the page to be read next. There was little written feedback in such records except for the occasional 'reads with expression' or 'well done'.

87. In a few of the ineffective schools, there was no system at all for recording pupils' skills, attitudes, strategies and the quality of their reading. Sometimes, this led to pupils reading books which were not matched well to their abilities or their interests. A comment from an able Year 1 pupil was typical:

My books are really easy. I would like some harder ones but Miss does not let me go on to a harder colour and I have to stick to these even though they are boring.

88. Occasionally, the only record was a pupil's home-school diary. Some of the diaries gave misleading information, for instance recording 'fluent reader' for a pupil who had not reached level 2 in reading. One pupil's reading diary had 'SEN' written on the cover; the pupil, without prompting, explained, 'It means I'm in the bottom group'. In some instances, the most perceptive remarks were made by parents, such as, 'Follows individual words well with her finger' and 'Has remembered magic "e"'.

89. In a few schools, however, there were excellent reading diaries which not only communicated effectively between

home and school, but also played an important part in promoting the pupils' self-evaluation. The teachers had a very good grasp of what the pupils already knew and the appropriate next steps; these were identified as short-term targets, often recorded by the pupils themselves. The targets often derived from a whole-school assessment policy which set out clearly the stages in learning to read.

90. A common weakness among almost all schools, however, was pupils' lack of understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses. Few were aware of targets that had been set for them and very few were able to talk about what they were good at in reading and what they needed to improve. Pupils talked simply of needing to 'read more' or needing to read 'harder books'. Where pupils were aware of targets, these often related to fluency and expression rather than to improving understanding or specific strategies.
91. Only a small number of schools involved pupils in assessing their own skills. In these cases, pupils were strongly aware of how well they were doing. They were motivated, understood what was expected of them and how they could continue to improve.

Teaching reading beyond the literacy hour

92. In the effective schools, pupils had opportunities that extended well beyond the typical literacy hour, to practise and to improve their reading skills. Reading had a high profile in the curriculum with time given to it in addition to literacy lessons, such as using the library and the reading of a class novel.
93. In these schools, pupils spoke positively about their reading across different subjects. Several schools had successfully broadened their approach to include a wider range of reading material in their selection of class readers and guided reading texts to cover content being taught in other subjects. One school with particularly high standards in reading actively promoted a love of literature throughout the school. Teachers introduced pupils early on to a range of classic children's books through reading class novels regularly:

In response to the Primary National Strategy, a school reviewed the curriculum to introduce more literature for pupils in Years 3 and 4. Pupils were introduced to both classic literature and books by popular modern children's authors. These were easily available for pupils alongside other books by the same author for pupils to read or just dip into. This proved a powerful catalyst to teaching reading across the curriculum and a valuable opportunity for pupils to pursue the work of a favourite author and to study him or her in more depth. Teachers linked their work on the class novel across subjects. Pupils not only read the novel but, through the carefully planned cross-curricular work, enhanced their understanding of the context, place and time in which it was set.

94. Teaching in some effective schools also built on pupils' reading as a resource for writing across different subjects. For example, one school clarified which reading and writing skills were to be developed sequentially through each subject. Lists of resources were drawn together from the Internet and resource banks supported each unit of study. Pupils were also involved in creating hyperlinks for others to use. Such activities made reading purposeful and provided opportunities for pupils to apply the skills they were learning. In another school, close study of the textual features of a range of fiction and non-fiction was used to teach writing and to meet the writing requirements of particular subjects.

Identification, intervention and support

95. Although identification, intervention and support were substantially better in the effective schools, there was also good practice in almost half of the schools with low attainment. Overall, however, provision was unsatisfactory in fewer than one in twenty of the effective schools compared to more than one in four of the ineffective schools. Most additional support was focused on raising attainment but did not address improving the attitudes of reluctant readers.

96. Many schools attributed pupils' low attainment or reluctance to read to difficulties outside their control, such as specific SEN or a lack of support from home. The quality of teaching, however, was the crucial factor in whether pupils made sufficient progress. As one SEN co-ordinator accurately put it: 'It's an instructional issue'.

Identification of and support for reading difficulties

97. Most schools welcomed parents' knowledge of their children. In the effective schools, early identification and suitable programmes were key characteristics of successful provision. Teachers in the Foundation Stage were particularly vigilant in spotting pupils who showed no interest in books or those with a poor visual memory, poor auditory skills or a receptive language difficulty. One in four of the ineffective schools, however, did not identify pupils' difficulties early enough.

98. All the schools used some form of intervention to support low-attaining pupils. Most, but not all, used the common NLS strategies: Early Literacy Support (ELS), Additional Literacy Support (ALS) and, later, Further Literacy Support (FLS). The most effective schools used intervention programmes flexibly, monitoring pupils' progress regularly. For example, in one school, the headteacher and SEN co-ordinator monitored the outcomes of the intervention programmes: if pupils had been part of ELS in Year 1 and were still struggling in Year 3, the school would not use ALS automatically without careful discussion of the pupil's specific difficulties. If ALS was unlikely to solve the difficulties, the school planned a different kind of support. In many of the ineffective schools, however, one form of intervention followed another without enough evaluation of pupils' progress and specific needs.

99. Success in supporting lower-attaining pupils was related not simply to the intervention strategies themselves, but also to the careful focusing of support and the knowledge of those leading the intervention programmes. Some were led by specialists such as the SEN co-ordinator. In many cases, their expertise was effective in raising standards.

Some SEN co-ordinators, although not all, were highly skilled teachers and, through leading training and demonstrating teaching, they helped others to see how lower-attaining pupils might be supported.

Case study: early intervention

The headteacher recognised the SEN co-ordinator's expertise. She therefore took the key role in the teaching of phonics and in providing related training for all staff. She led the school's approach to intervention for pupils at risk of falling behind. Interventions included 'snappy lessons' for pupils, taught by the SEN co-ordinator and other trained staff such as nursery nurses and teaching assistants. These lessons lasted for around 20 minutes in Year R and 25 minutes in Year 1. They were held mostly during registration periods, twice or three times a week. In Years 3 and 4, intervention was used to teach more advanced spelling strategies.

The 'snappy lesson' was a fundamental part of the successful, early intervention. It comprised: whole-group work; built-in repetition and reinforcement; encouragement of active recall; active, oral, lively teaching with a good pace; and multi-sensory approaches so that pupils were able to integrate what they were hearing, seeing and doing. Direct instruction and repetition were critical to pupils' mastery of their learning and the success of the intervention: 'I do, we do together, you do'.

Two types of 'snappy lesson' were held. For reading, there was work on sounds, blending, sound manipulation and reading. For spelling, again, work on sounds, hearing the sounds in words, spelling words, writing sentences from dictation and reading them back to the teacher.

The SEN co-ordinator's work had a direct impact on the standards achieved at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. The proportion of pupils on the SEN register had fallen each year since 1998, even though the

percentages of pupils eligible for FSM remained fairly constant. In 2003, the test results for reading at Key Stage 1 showed, for the first time in several years, virtually no difference between the attainment of boys and girls. This was also reflected in attainment in reading at Key Stage 2.

100. Some SEN co-ordinators were also skilled in designing specific programmes for low-attaining pupils in collaboration with LEA learning support teams. Schools valued such support services and their expertise benefited the lower-attaining pupils.

One school ran a three-phase reading recovery programme, each phase of which was undertaken over twelve weeks. Screening was undertaken through the involvement of teachers from the LEA. Although designed specifically for Year 1 pupils, it had also been used with some pupils in Year 2. The first, highly structured, phase was run individually, involving a daily half-hour session. Progress checks every four weeks and assessments focused on pupils' ability to hear sounds and to identify letters, and also included an element of word- and text-level understanding. The programme had a marked effect on improving reading standards.

101. The majority of the teaching of the intervention programmes was at least satisfactory. In some instances, teaching assistants adapted the programmes sensitively to meet the needs of individuals.

I have moved on now and use the material flexibly. The ELS programme is good, but there are some activities and ideas I know that I can miss out. The children do not need them.

102. However, too many teaching assistants lacked the confidence to adapt the materials, even when they felt that some pupils already knew what was being taught. In consequence, some pupils learnt little from the sessions and found the work too easy. Some teaching assistants

did too much, limiting pupils' independence and restricting their learning. At other times, they provided too little support. For example, in teaching syntactic cues, a teaching assistant decided to cover some of the words in the sentence so that the pupils could work out what they were. However, she covered too many of the words so that it was difficult to work out what they might be. The teaching assistant had been unable to attend the training for this intervention strategy and felt that she was having to pick things up as she went along.

103. In a number of schools, teaching assistants had received no formal training for their work or had had little training since the intervention programmes had first been introduced. Although some teaching assistants were very knowledgeable, overall they felt that they needed more training. This was borne out by some of their teaching.

104. Teaching assistants did not always diagnose pupils' difficulties accurately enough. For example, in an ALS group, a teaching assistant felt that pupils were making spelling mistakes because they were working too quickly; she did not diagnose that they were having difficulties in hearing all the individual phonemes in a word and, therefore, were not spelling the words accurately.

105. Teaching assistants were often deployed to work with some of the most challenging groups and individual pupils and, frequently, bore the main responsibility for listening to them read. Records in a few schools suggested that there had been little individual or group teaching for the lower-attaining pupils by their teacher.

Parental support

106. Parents played an important role in developing pupils' positive attitudes and supporting their reading at home. Pupils with positive attitudes almost always spoke with enthusiasm about reading at home, buying books regularly and visiting the local library. They were proud of the range of books and audio-visual reading materials that they had built up at home. They enjoyed talking

about reading with members of their family and were encouraged and motivated by this personal attention.

107. Pupils whose parents did not listen to them read at home were disappointed but often gave clear reasons for it: 'My dad doesn't live with us and my mum is sometimes too busy' or 'My mum is too tired at the end of the day'. Occasionally, in schools with large numbers of pupils where English was not the language of the home, pupils recognised that their parents did not always have the confidence or skills in English to help them read.

It would be good if we had books in different languages because my mum could definitely read these to me. She can't help me with my reading at home because she cannot read English.

108. Although, in most cases, this did not affect negatively their attitudes towards reading, it reduced their opportunities to practise the skills and vocabulary they had learned at school.
109. Many schools facing challenging circumstances found it particularly difficult to attract a reasonable level of parental support. They made considerable efforts to involve them, but also made additional arrangements for teaching assistants and trained volunteers to read with pupils whose parents did not listen to them read at home. Pupils valued these arrangements; they often developed positive relationships with their reading partner and looked forward to reading to them. This, combined with high expectations, helped to raise standards.
110. The ineffective schools saw the lack of time parents gave to listening to their children read as an insurmountable stumbling block. They were keen to involve parents but tended to encourage their general engagement rather than specific initiatives to help them in supporting their child's reading. In contrast, schools with high standards in reading saw parents' involvement as fundamental to raising standards and worked effectively to engage parents through:

- setting out clearly the school's approach to reading
- explaining pupils' reading targets
- explaining how pupils might be supported at home and giving guidance on completing home-school reading diaries
- running reading workshops and family literacy sessions
- providing good induction booklets.

111. Some of the effective schools reported pressure from parents for their children to move through the reading scheme quickly, even if pupils could not cope adequately: 'They just want to tick it off and say, "My child is on Level 16"'. However, they were generally effective in counteracting this through communicating their policies and practice persuasively.
112. A few schools organised reading clubs for parents. Schools believed that these had a positive effect on pupils. In one such club, organised over 10 weeks in conjunction with the local library service, pupils and their parents took home a book each week and then answered questions, graded in difficulty. Pupils talked positively about the experience.
113. Other schools concentrated their efforts to good effect in supporting parents of pupils with SEN. Weekly open meetings were held for parents, with the SEN co-ordinator available for 45 minutes after school. Parents felt able to drop in without an appointment for help and advice. This open-door policy marked out schools where standards were already high, but where they worked to further their success.

Document reference number: HMI 2393

To obtain an additional copy, contact:

Ofsted Publications Centre

Telephone: 07002 637833

Fax: 07002 693274

E-mail: freepublications@ofsted.gov.uk

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation, and the source and date of publication are stated.

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE
www.ofsted.gov.uk

