



English 2000–05

A review of inspection evidence

**Better
education
and care**

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Executive summary

This is the first in a new series of reports to be published by Ofsted. From September 2005, school inspections will no longer report in detail on subjects, although the Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (HMCI) will draw on evidence from Ofsted's programme of subject inspections. Detailed reports on individual subjects will be published on a three year cycle, providing an opportunity to review developments, evaluate changes and identify areas for improvement at a national level. This is the first such report to be published.

It draws on evidence from inspections of schools from 2000–05 and recent surveys by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) of issues such as the performance of boys in writing and the achievement of advanced bilingual learners. The programme of subject specialist visits from 2003–05 also contributes evidence. It also includes evidence from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and from a research review commissioned by Ofsted.

Standards in English have continued to rise over the period 2000–05 but remain below targets set by the government. Standards have changed relatively little at Key Stage 1.¹ The introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) led to significant initial improvements in Key Stage 2 test results, although results were static over the period 2000–03. At Key Stage 3, test results have improved slowly but steadily; even so, they are still several percentage points below the government's target. There has been a small improvement at GCSE level from 2000–2005.

English is one of the best taught subjects in both primary and secondary schools. Although it is difficult to measure accurately the improvements in teaching over the past few years because of changes to the inspection framework, the picture appears to be one of continuing, if slow, improvement. Teachers' use of assessment is consistently the weakest element, despite a great deal of training in recent years.

Too little attention has been given to teaching the full National Curriculum programme of study for speaking and listening and the range of contexts provided for speaking and listening remains too limited. Emphasis on developing effective direct teaching approaches has led, at best, to good whole class discussion but, in too many classes, discussion is dominated by the teacher and pupils have only limited opportunities for productive speaking and listening.

Standards of reading have improved. However, there is a significant and continuing variation in standards amongst schools which have similar contexts. Too few schools have given sufficient thought to promoting pupils' independent

¹ 2005 results are not yet validated.

reading. There is evidence that many pupils are reading for pleasure less widely than previously.

Standards of writing have also improved. While pupils' understanding of the features of different text types has increased, more attention needs to be given to helping them to appreciate the importance of the audience for, and purpose and content of, writing that they are asked to do. Schools also need to consider how to develop continuity in teaching and assessing writing.

The significant gap between girls' and boys' achievement increases as they get older and it is greatest in writing. Evidence from the most effective schools indicates that more can be done to improve boys' writing.

There are significant differences in the attainment of pupils in primary schools from different minority ethnic groups. This continues into secondary schools where some Black Caribbean and Black African pupils, in particular, make limited progress. Advanced bilingual learners achieve less well in writing than pupils of similar ability who have English as their first language.

Schools' use of performance data has improved. A wide range of data is used to track pupils' progress, challenge under-achievement and provide intervention programmes. However, in some schools too little analysis takes place to identify differences in achievement between groups of pupils.

The NLS has stimulated significant changes to teaching and learning in English, including more direct teaching, a clearer structure to lessons and more precise learning objectives. However, some teachers have interpreted the NLS guidance inflexibly and, as a result, learning does not always match the particular needs of pupils. The move to the Primary National Strategy has not yet led to any substantial changes to teaching and learning in English.

The Key Stage 3 Strategy has had a positive impact on schemes of work in secondary English departments, leading to a better balance of literary and non-literary texts. However, schools need to improve their provision for developing literacy across all subjects. Schools which admit large numbers of pupils into Year 7 with below average levels of attainment need clearer advice about how to provide and manage the necessary support. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) in English has improved over the past few years, although the gap between the best practice and the rest continues to grow.

The report makes recommendations at a national, local education authority (LEA) and school level, particularly about assessment, literacy across the curriculum, speaking and listening, and the use of ICT. A number of recommendations are made about reading, including the need for teachers to keep up-to-date with good quality contemporary texts for children and young people. Improving the achievement of specific groups is also a focus: boys,

pupils with below-average attainment in Year 7, and certain minority ethnic groups.

Recent gains are clear, although the rate of improvement has slowed. There is scope for schools to exercise greater imagination, creativity and flexibility in teaching English. The challenge for them is to help pupils become independent so that, through reading, writing, speaking and listening, they can make sense of what other people have said, written and done, and can use this knowledge skilfully and confidently to shape and communicate their own view of the world.

Introduction

1. From September 2005, school inspections will no longer report in detail on subjects, although the Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (HMCI) will draw on evidence from Ofsted's programme of subject inspections. Stakeholders, including the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), local education authorities (LEAs) and schools, will continue to need a detailed and evidence-based view of each subject. To respond to this, detailed reports on individual subjects will be published on a three year cycle, providing an opportunity to review developments, evaluate changes and identify areas for improvement at a national level. This report on English is the first such report.
2. As this report covers the period 2000–05, the opportunity has been taken to draw attention to some earlier reports that remain relevant. In preparing for this report, Ofsted commissioned the University of Exeter to provide a review of research on the teaching of English.² The report, written by Debra Myhill and Rosalind Fisher, identified a number of issues that had interested researchers:
 - international conceptions of literacy
 - talking, thinking and learning in English
 - achievement and the question of boys
 - understanding writers and writing
 - cognitive perspectives on literacy
 - wider personal reading
 - ICT and multimodality.
3. Ofsted also asked the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to provide a view of changes to the subject over this period, based on evidence from their own monitoring. This is referred to in the text.
4. This report appears at a significant time in the development of the subject. The QCA has recently launched *English 21*, an initiative designed to generate discussion about how English should develop as a school subject over the next decade. Ofsted welcomes this dialogue with the teaching community and others, including parents, pupils and employers, about English teaching and the curriculum in the 21st century.
5. The subject frequently attracts national attention and, occasionally, controversy. A recent article in the educational press called once again for an urgent review of English teaching.³ Many teachers have found it difficult to manage the frequent and significant changes to English over recent years, while continuing to try to raise standards; the impact of this on some teachers has been decreasing confidence about the nature of the subject, its position in the curriculum and how it should be taught. HMCI

² Dr Debra Myhill and Dr Rosalind Fisher's report, which includes a detailed bibliography, is on Ofsted's website at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications

³ *The classic dilemma*, article by Viv Ellis in the *Times Educational Supplement*, 20 May 2005.

called recently for a re-consideration of the proposal for a National English Centre which, he argued, might help to restore a sense of direction and purpose to the teaching of English. It is hoped that this report will contribute positively to discussion about how standards and quality in English might be improved further.

Key findings

- ❑ Standards in English have continued to rise over the period 2000–05 but remain below targets set by the government. Standards have changed relatively little at Key Stage 1. The introduction of the NLS led to significant initial improvements in Key Stage 2 test results, although results were static over the period 2000–03. At Key Stage 3, results have shown a slow but steady improvement, from 63% of pupils in 2000 who achieved level 5 or better to 71% in 2004, still several percentage points below the government's target of 75%. There has been a small improvement in GCSE grades in English over this period.
- ❑ English is one of the best taught subjects in primary and secondary schools, although the rate of improvement in the quality of teaching has slowed recently in comparison with other subjects. However, the quality of teaching in around 30% of lessons in primary schools is no better than satisfactory. This is unlikely to raise pupils' standards significantly, particularly for those who enter school with low levels of literacy.
- ❑ The NLS has led to more direct teaching, a clearer structure to lessons and more precise learning objectives. However, some teachers use the learning objectives from the Framework inflexibly, seeing them as a set of requirements to be ticked off and, as a result, learning does not match the particular needs of the pupils in the class.
- ❑ The strategy has also helped schools to teach the full programme for National Curriculum English, although there has been too little attention, in many schools, to speaking and listening.
- ❑ The use of assessment is consistently the weakest element of teaching, despite a great deal of training in recent years. Too many pupils are unclear about what they need to do to improve their work.
- ❑ Schools' use of performance data has improved since 2000. A wide range of data is used to track pupils' progress, challenge underachievement and provide intervention programmes. However, in some schools too little analysis takes place to identify differences in achievement between groups of pupils.
- ❑ There has been a marked improvement in the reading standards achieved but there remains a significant and continuing variability in performance across sometimes very similar schools. In addition, too few schools have given sufficient time and thought to how to promote pupils' independent reading and there is evidence that many pupils are reading less widely for pleasure than previously. Many teachers struggle to keep up-to-date with good quality texts for their pupils to read.
- ❑ Standards of writing have improved as a result of guidance from the national strategies. However, although pupils' understanding of the features of different text types has improved, some teachers give too little thought to ensuring that pupils fully consider the audience, purpose and

content for their writing. Schools also need to consider how to develop continuity in teaching and assessing writing.

- ❑ The gap between girls' and boys' achievement in English is significant and increases as they move through school. This gap is greatest in relation to writing. Evidence from the most effective schools suggests that more can be done in many schools to improve the standards of boys' writing.
- ❑ There are significant differences in the attainment of pupils from different minority ethnic groups by the end of Key Stage 2 and this continues into secondary schools where some black pupils in particular make limited progress. There is some evidence that advanced bilingual learners achieve less well in writing than pupils of similar ability for whom English is their first language.
- ❑ Guidance from the Key Stage 3 Strategy has had a significant and positive impact on schemes of work for English in secondary schools, enabling them to produce more detailed plans across the key stage. This has led to a better balance of literary and non-literary texts and more informed thinking about progression.
- ❑ Problems with marking and moderating the Key Stage 3 English tests have led many schools to question the validity of the results. The results for 2004 indicate that standards of writing have risen. However, secondary schools need to improve their provision for developing and evaluating literacy across all subjects.
- ❑ There is an urgent need for schools to improve the literacy skills of pupils who enter Year 7 with attainment below level 4. The secondary Strategy will need to continue to provide effective guidance to help schools to manage the additional support programmes required.
- ❑ The use of ICT in English has improved over the past few years, although the gap between the best practice and the rest continues to widen. Most English teachers are now at least competent in this area. They use ICT effectively within individual units of work, but few schools have planned for pupils' progression in skills. As a result, too many pupils repeat work as they move from one year group to the next, without any noticeable increase in the challenge or sophistication of what they are asked to do.

Recommendations

6. At a national level there is a need for the DfES and partner agencies such as the QCA and the National Strategies to:
 - improve the confidence of teachers and schools in the outcomes of the national Key Stage 3 test results
 - demonstrate clearly how assessment for learning can be used effectively in English to raise standards
 - help schools to understand how to evaluate the development of literacy across the curriculum
 - provide clearer guidance for secondary schools on how to plan additional support programmes where there are large numbers of pupils working below level 4 when they enter Year 7
 - work with schools to improve the areas of the curriculum that are currently underdeveloped such as wider reading, the use of ICT and speaking and listening.

7. At LEA and regional level there is a need to:
 - share good practice from schools where boys achieve well in English
 - support senior managers in finding effective ways to improve pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum
 - ensure that teachers are able to keep up-to-date with good quality contemporary texts for children and young people
 - improve the exchange of assessment information to enhance continuity in pupils' writing
 - provide intensive support for the development of ICT in English in schools where it is currently weak.

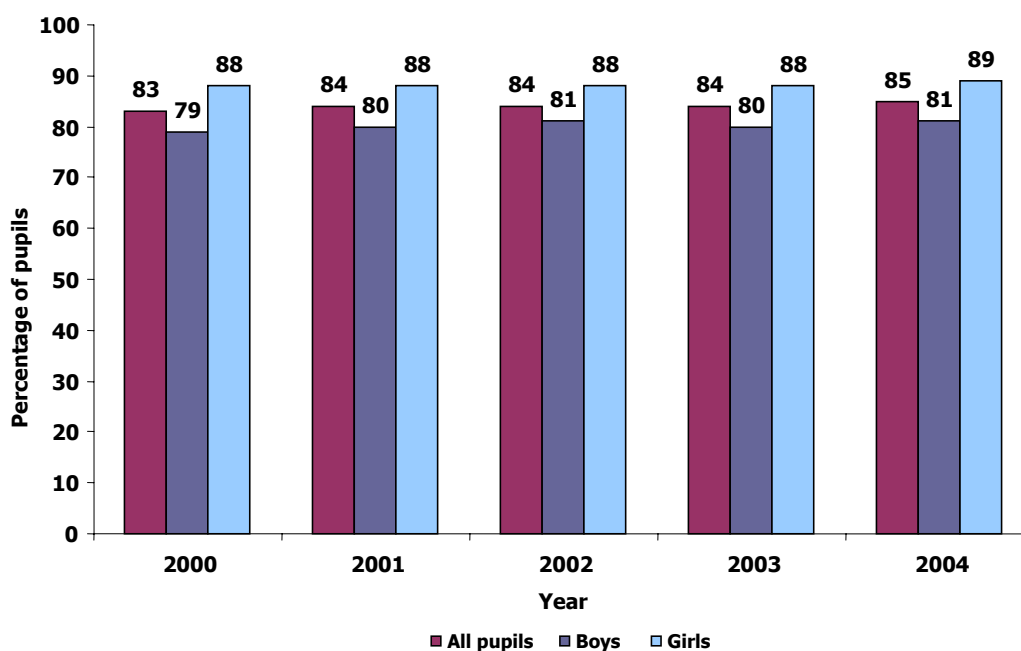
8. Schools need to:
 - analyse data effectively to identify variations in achievement amongst different groups of pupils
 - monitor and evaluate the progress of underachieving groups in English, such as boys and certain minority ethnic groups
 - ensure that the most able pupils achieve highly in English, including advanced bilingual learners of English
 - develop varied and engaging approaches to learning in the classroom that are flexible enough to stimulate and meet the needs of pupils
 - develop pupils' understanding of how they can improve in English
 - help pupils to continue to read widely as they grow older
 - provide balance in teaching writing to give full consideration to purpose, audience and content
 - make sure that schemes of work give equal emphasis to the development of pupils' speaking and listening as to reading and writing.

Section 1. Overview: standards and quality of teaching in English

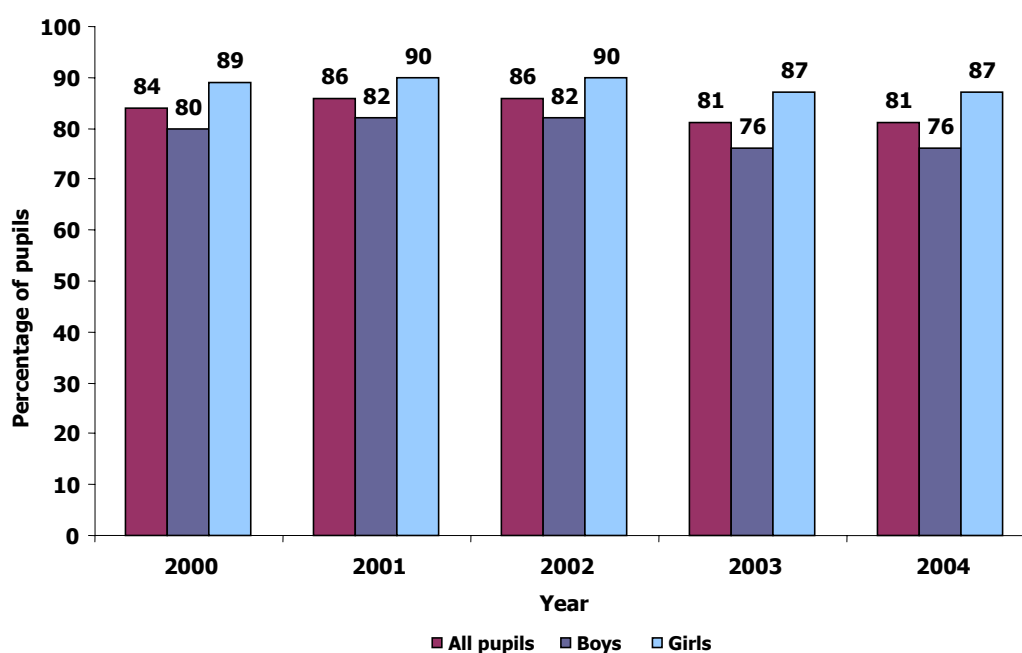
1.1 Standards in English

9. Standards in English have changed relatively little at Key Stage 1, as measured by the national tests, over the past five years. In reading, 83% of pupils reached at least level 2 in 2000; last year, this had risen to 85%. The gender gap at this level in reading has also changed little and is now eight percentage points (Figure 1).

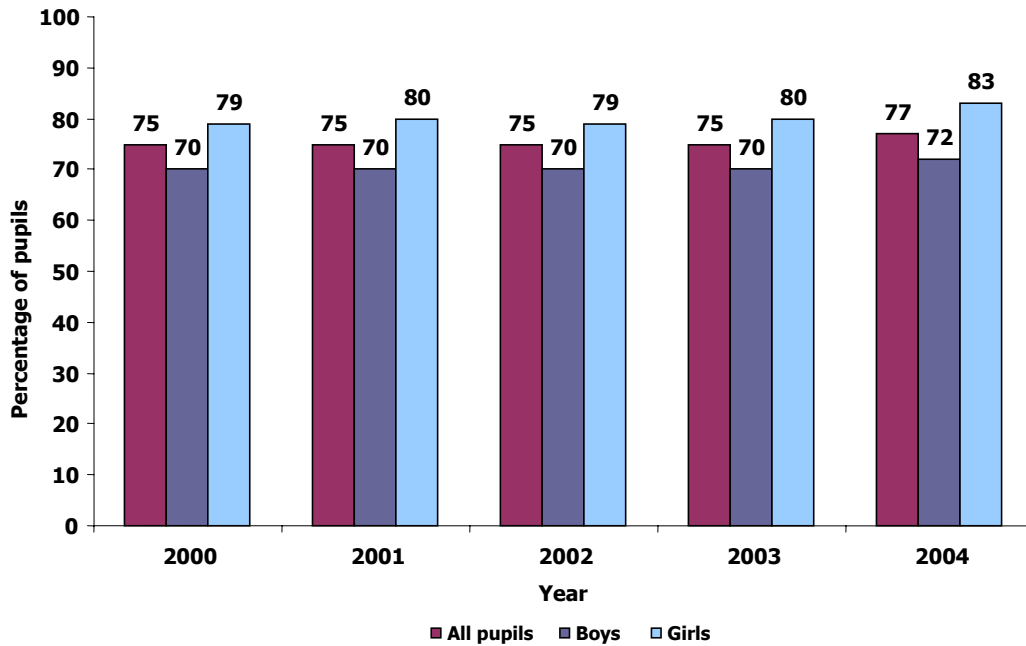
Figure 1. Percentage of pupils achieving level 2 at Key Stage 1 reading.



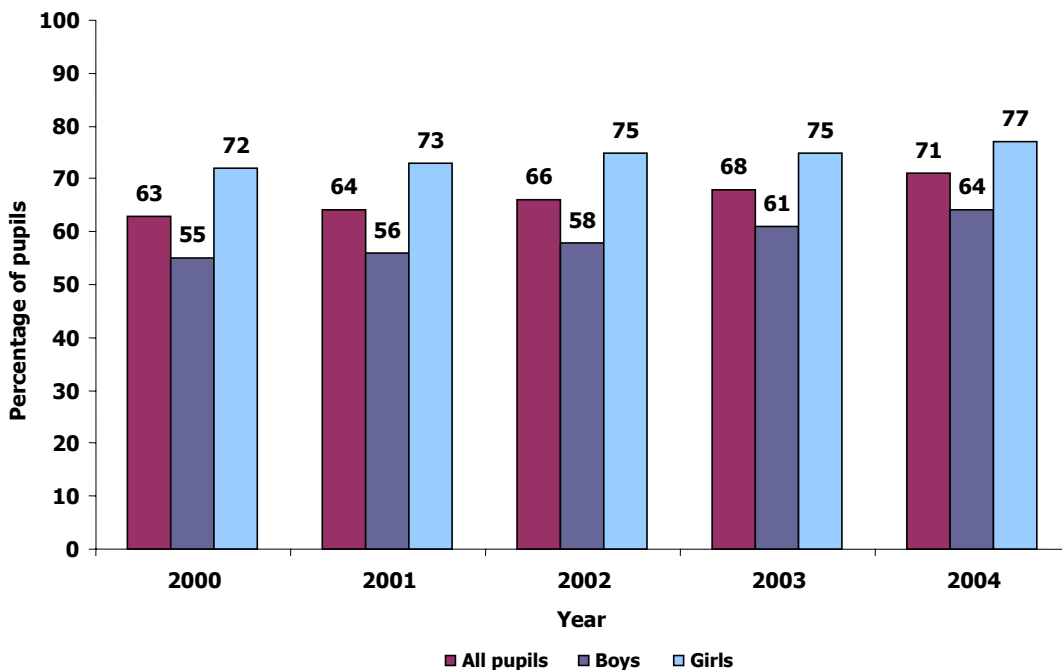
10. Standards in writing, as measured by the tests, declined from 84% of pupils achieving level 2 or above in 2000 to 81% last year (Figure 2). The gender gap changed little over this period. There was, however, a near doubling in the percentage of pupils achieving level 3 in writing.

Figure 2. Percentage of pupils achieving level 2 at Key Stage 1 writing.

11. The early years of the NLS saw test scores improve significantly at the end of Key Stage 2. In 1998, 65% of pupils achieved level 4 or above at the end of Key Stage 2. The strategy was introduced in the autumn of that year and in 1999 results had already improved by five percentage points. By 2000, 75% of pupils gained level 4 or above. However, for the next four years standards stayed stubbornly at this level (Figure 3). In 2004, results improved slightly to 77%, with a similar rate of improvement in both reading and writing, but this was still below the government's 2002 target that 80% of pupils should achieve level 4 or above. The performance of girls improved slightly more than that of boys over the period and, consequently, the gap between girls and boys increased to 11 percentage points. The percentage of pupils who reached the higher level 5 declined slightly. Pupils' attainment in writing lags behind reading and this has changed little in recent years.

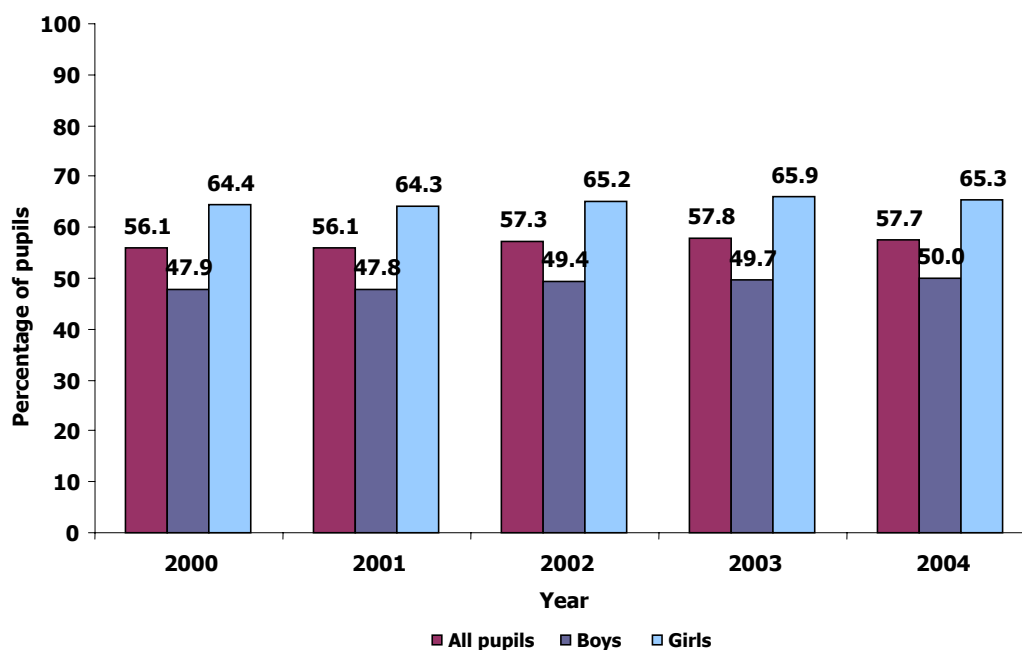
Figure 3. Percentage of pupils achieving level 4 at Key Stage 2 English.

12. At Key Stage 3, results have shown a consistent but slow improvement over the same period (Figure 4). There was no immediate sharp increase, as there had been at Key Stage 2. In 2000, 63% of pupils achieved level 5 or above; by 2004 this had risen to 71%, still four percentage points below the government's target of 75%. The gap between girls and boys was 13 percentage points in 2004. The percentage of pupils achieving level 6 or better rose little over the period; in comparison to mathematics, too few pupils achieve the higher levels in English.

Figure 4. Percentage of pupils achieving level 5 at Key Stage 3 English.

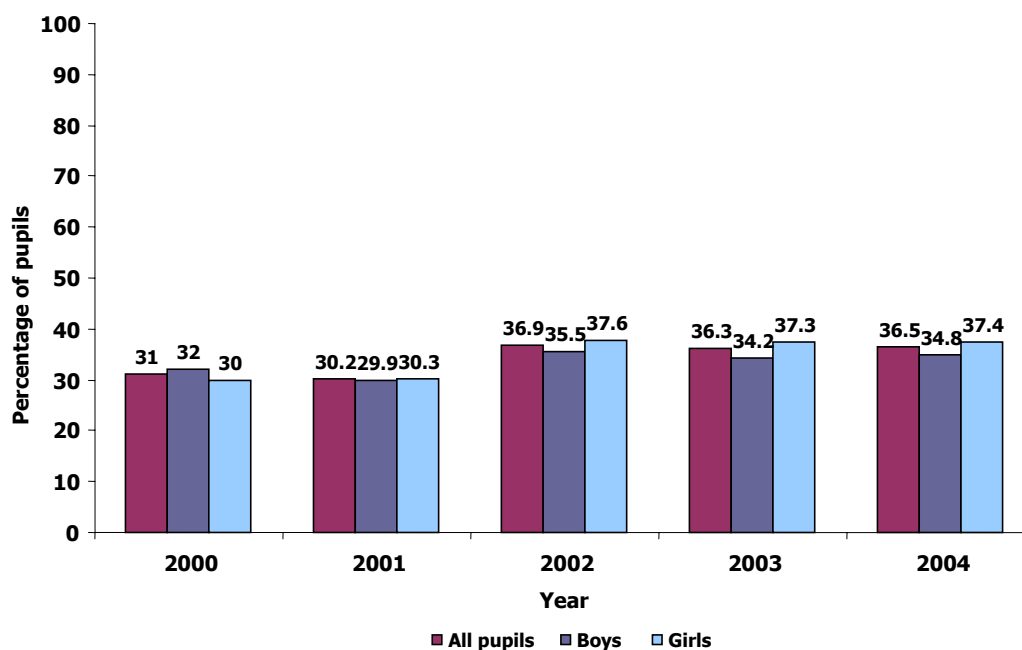
13. The Key Stage 3 tests have been marked by a significant number of difficulties, particularly in 2004, largely over marking and moderation. There is no evidence to suggest that overall the test results are not accurate in showing steady improvement. However, many English departments have found their pupils' results to be surprisingly inconsistent, particularly in comparison with mathematics. It needs to be acknowledged that many English teachers have severe reservations about the efficacy of the national tests at Key Stage 3.
14. There has been little change in GCSE performance in English. In 2000, 56% of pupils gained grades A*–C and nearly 58% in 2004 (Figure 5). The gap between girls' and boys' performance was 15 percentage points last year. Despite many initiatives and much effort by schools, this gap grows wider as pupils get older.

Figure 5. Percentage of pupils achieving A* to C at GCSE English/English language.⁴



15. At advanced level, the proportion of pupils achieving grades A–B in English/English language courses jumped in 2002 but has since remained stable. Caution needs to be exercised when interpreting these data: 2000 saw the introduction of AS level exams and 2001 the introduction of A2s, and this had an impact both on subject choice and overall results. Since 2001 the results cover the total achievement of pupils aged 17 and 18. Over one in three candidates achieve one of the higher grades (Figure 6).

⁴ These figures are for all pupils in maintained secondary schools.

Figure 6. Percentage of pupils achieving A to B at English/English language A level.

1.2 Quality of teaching

16. Evidence from section 10 school inspections has confirmed consistently that English is one of the best taught subjects in both primary and secondary schools. Quantifying improvement over the past few years is difficult because of changes to the inspection frameworks and to the criteria for judging the quality of teaching. Nevertheless, the picture appears to be one of continuing, if slow, improvements, although the rate of improvement in English is less in recent years than in most other subjects. Teaching in English needs to develop further if standards are to rise significantly.
17. The proportion of teaching overall that is very good or excellent has increased over the past four years at all stages (Figures 7 and 8). The most significant improvement is at Key Stage 3, in some measure a reflection of the extensive training and support provided by the Key Stage 3 National Strategy. The amount of unsatisfactory teaching remains low, although it has not changed significantly since 2000. Around three in ten lessons in primary schools are no better than satisfactory. Teaching of this quality is unlikely to raise pupils' standards significantly, particularly for those who enter school with low levels of literacy.

Figure 7. Quality of teaching in English by year group (percentage of lessons), January 2000 – July 2000.

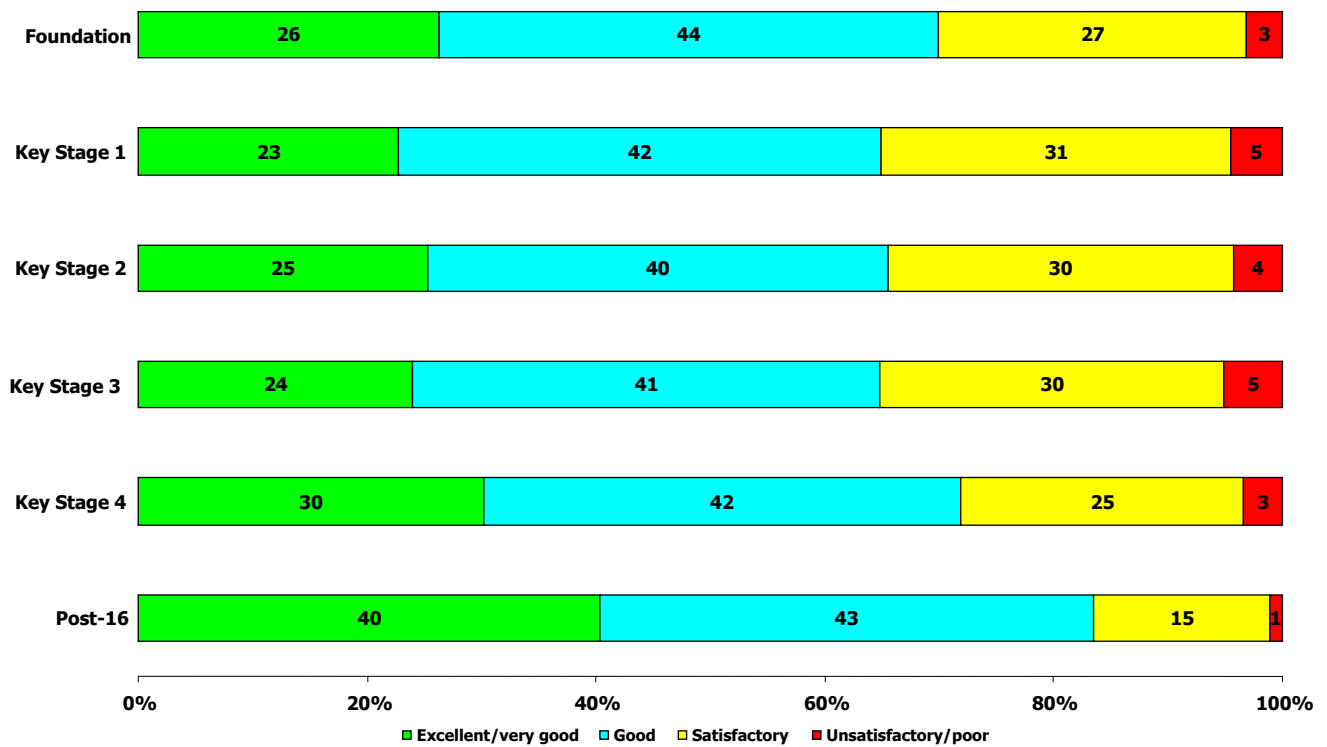
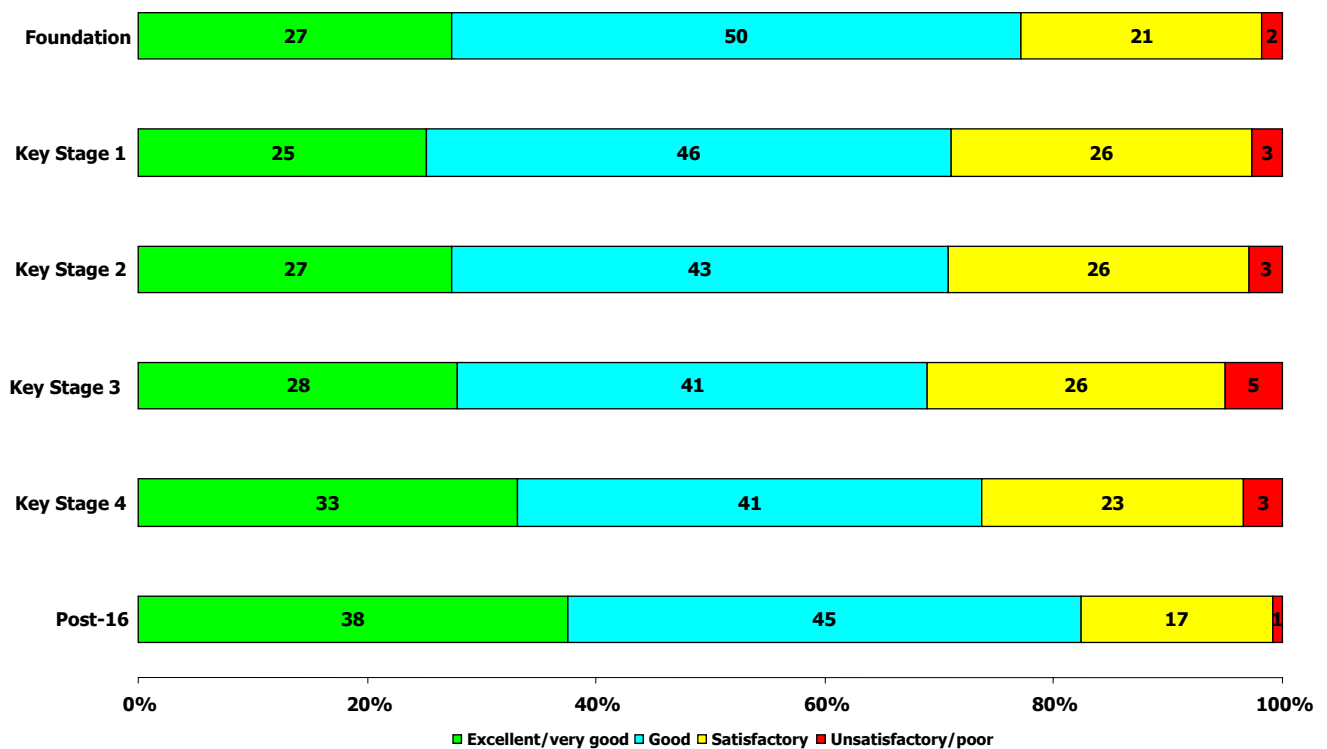


Figure 8. Quality of teaching in English by year group (percentage of lessons), 2003/04.⁵



⁵ Foundation grades for Figure 8 relate to the area of learning of 'Communications, language and literacy'.

18. Evidence from school inspections on the quality of teaching is broadly supported by evidence from HMI surveys, especially the annual evaluations of the NLS and, later, the Primary National Strategy and the Key Stage 3 National Strategy. The most recent evaluation of the Primary National Strategy reported that the quality of teaching in English had improved slightly, although it also drew attention to a significant proportion of lessons that were just satisfactory.⁶ Evaluation of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy has also identified a small improvement in teaching.
19. In both primary and secondary schools, certain aspects of teaching in English have improved more markedly than others. In particular:
- teachers' subject knowledge has improved, especially in primary schools, largely as a result of the extensive training provided by the national strategies
 - planning has improved, with clearer learning objectives and positive engagement from pupils
 - the teaching of writing is more systematic and linked clearly to pupils' experience of reading.

Most pupils continue to have positive views about their English lessons, although they tell inspectors that over-preparation for the national tests reduces their enjoyment.

20. Strengths of teaching in English often include a good pace and well structured activities. Teachers are increasingly alert to the different ways in which pupils learn and try to plan lessons that will meet their needs. However, some teachers lack the confidence and subject knowledge to respond sufficiently flexibly to what pupils need. They interpret the recommended four-part lesson structure as something to be applied on all occasions. HMCI's Annual Report (2003/04) makes a similar point in relation to secondary trainee teachers, describing 'a tendency towards safe and unimaginative teaching...partly because trainees use the structure and content of the Strategy too rigidly'. Teachers generally have become more confident recently in using direct teaching methods, such as demonstrating aspects of the processes of writing or explaining and illustrating grammatical terms. However, many teachers still need to have the courage to be innovative, making greater use, in particular, of group, collaborative and independent approaches and a wider range of teaching strategies to engage and challenge pupils.
21. This lack of flexibility also applies to teachers' use of learning objectives. At best, they plan carefully over a sequence of lessons, using realistic objectives that match pupils' needs. For too many primary and secondary teachers, however, the objectives become a tick list to be checked off

⁶ *The literacy and numeracy strategies and the primary curriculum* (HMI 2395), Ofsted, 2005.

because they follow the frameworks for teaching too slavishly. As a result, too many objectives are identified and they become impossible to assess in the lesson. This is compounded where plenary sessions are unsatisfactory, either too short or involving simply a recount by pupils of what they have done. As a result, they are unclear about whether the objectives have been achieved or what they need to learn next.

1.3 Assessment in English

22. Despite a great deal of guidance in recent years, teachers' use of assessment is a consistently weak element of teaching. Too many pupils are not clear enough about what they need to do to improve their work.
23. The quality of teachers' marking varies too much. At its best, marking is detailed, provides a personal response to what pupils write which helps to increase their confidence as writers, and clearly identifies specific areas for improvement. However, especially in primary schools, marking sometimes fails to tell pupils how they can get better and tends towards indiscriminate praise.
24. Too few schools have a clear policy on correcting errors in pupils' work. Consequently, some teachers identify all mistakes, some almost none, and it is rarely made clear to pupils how they should respond. In these circumstances, pupils do not follow up the corrections in their subsequent work. Recent QCA guidance on marking should help to tackle these issues.⁷ Schools also need to consider how work is marked in other areas of the curriculum; this is generally less effective than in English. Variations in teachers' marking of writing across subjects can confuse pupils.
25. Curricular or learning targets are common in many schools and often effective. However, some teachers set too many or ones that do not match pupils' needs. Few teachers have clear procedures for reviewing targets with pupils, discussing progress and determining new areas for improvement. The targets are often not reinforced systematically through marking.
26. Assessment in English has tended to focus recently on weaknesses in writing. While this is an understandable response to national concerns about standards, it often means that pupils are not clear enough about their strengths and weaknesses in reading. Despite the widespread use of reading records or journals, teachers rarely give pupils feedback about their independent reading or guidance about how to develop it. Guidance has been published on speaking and listening, but there is little evidence that this has yet had an impact in most schools.⁸ Too few pupils understand what it means to be good at speaking and listening.

⁷ *Marking: making a difference*, QCA, 2003.

⁸ For example, *Speaking, listening, learning: working with children in KS1–2*, QCA/DfES, 2004.

27. All teachers need to understand that improvements in pupils' reading, speaking and listening are likely to contribute directly to better performance in writing as well as being important in their own right.

28. Schools' use of performance data has improved since 2000. Schools routinely collect national test results, the results of the optional tests, standardised test results in reading and spelling and other information. Increasingly, such information is used to track pupils' progress, challenge under-achievement and provide intervention programmes for pupils who need specific support. However, in some schools there is too little analysis of such data to identify, for instance, differences in achievement. Schools need to look closely for any evidence of underachievement by any groups, including boys and minority ethnic pupils, and act on the information.

Section 2. Speaking and listening, reading and writing

2.1 Speaking and listening

29. When the National Curriculum was introduced, speaking and listening was one of the three attainment targets. However, it is not given the same attention or curriculum time as reading and writing. Formal assessment of pupils' speaking and listening skills is not required before GCSE level and, understandably, many teachers concentrate on developing pupils' reading and writing. Few schools assess speaking and listening rigorously before GCSE, although some are trying to develop pupils' self-evaluation. While curricular targets for writing are now common, it is rare to find that pupils have targets for speaking and listening, although there are many for whom this is the main obstacle to achievement.
30. The national strategies have emphasised active whole-class teaching and have focused on developing effective direct teaching approaches. At its best, this leads to good whole class discussion where teachers ask challenging questions, match them to pupils' ability and encourage detailed and reflective answers. In too many classes, however, discussion is dominated by the teacher and pupils' responses are short and limited. No time is provided for reflection. Myhill and Fisher argue that the 'recitation script of "initiation, response and feedback" is still prevalent' and that the 'requirement for pre-determined outcomes and a fast pace seem to militate against reflection and exploration of ideas'. Ofsted's evidence supports this.
31. Schools do not always seem to understand the importance of pupils' talk in developing both reading and writing. Myhill and Fisher quote research which argues that 'spoken language forms a constraint, a ceiling not only on the ability to comprehend but also on the ability to write, beyond which literacy cannot progress'. Too many teachers appear to have forgotten that speech 'supports and propels writing forward'. Pupils do not improve writing solely by doing more of it; good quality writing benefits from focused discussion that gives pupils a chance to talk through ideas before writing and to respond to friends' suggestions.
32. Too few lessons now use small group work effectively. The recommended four-part lesson structure appears to have inhibited good collaborative group work. Guided group work, led by the teacher, has been a positive development in some schools and provides the teacher with an opportunity to demonstrate different kinds of spoken language as well as supporting pupils' reading and writing work; however, it is an underused approach in many schools.
33. Training materials have been produced by the national strategies to raise the profile of speaking and listening and to disseminate good practice,

providing good ideas for individual lessons. Some primary teachers have responded positively and are trying to use pupils' collaborative talk more often, through the use of 'talk partners', but, in most classrooms, activities to develop pupils' talk remain limited.

34. Many schools pay too little attention to teaching the full National Curriculum programme of study for speaking and listening. English policies frequently refer to the importance of giving equal weight to speaking and listening in schemes of work; in reality, in many schools, this does not happen. Planning for speaking and listening lacks rigour. Few schemes of work include units whose main focus is to develop speaking and listening. Inspectors rarely see work of the quality and emphasis described in the QCA's publication, *Introducing the grammar of talk*.⁹
35. The revised National Curriculum for English drew on earlier work on language to give a high profile to the nature of spoken English and language change. This is rarely taught systematically in schools. The statutory orders for English at Key Stage 2 include, for instance, the following requirements.
- Pupils should be taught the grammatical constructions which are characteristic of spoken standard English.
 - Pupils should be taught about how language varies between standard and dialect forms and between spoken and written forms.
 - Pupils should take up and sustain different roles, adapting them to suit the situation, including chair, scribe and spokesperson.
36. These key elements of the National Curriculum are rarely integrated into English schemes of work. The situation is the same at Key Stage 3 where few of the requirements relating to language variation are taught rigorously in all schools. The activities chosen should also include presentations to different audiences, taking different roles in groups and a range of drama activities; these are rarely part of English lessons for all pupils. Schools need to review their schemes of work in order to ensure that the statutory requirements for speaking and listening are thoroughly taught.
37. Drama is infrequently taught in most primary schools. The primary English report that accompanied HMCI's Annual Report (2003/04) judged that:
- ...drama remains too little taught in most primary schools. Sometimes, pupils engage in simple role play or 'hot-seating' activities but these are rarely developed sufficiently or with enough emphasis on the quality of the speaking and listening involved.*
38. Secondary schools, especially larger ones, generally establish separate departments for drama. This makes sensible use of specialist teachers to

⁹ *Introducing the grammar of talk*, QCA, 2004.

develop skills and understanding in drama, as well as contributing to pupils' speaking and listening skills; however, it often leads to limited contact between English and drama departments. As with English, assessment in drama remains an area for improvement. The 2002/03 secondary report judged that:

The assessment of pupils' achievement in drama is of very variable quality. At Key Stage 3, the absence of any published levels often means that too little attention is paid to how pupils' skills and knowledge are developing in drama. In some schools, assessment in drama lessons taught by the English teacher focuses on the drama strand of speaking and listening in English. In others, assessment of skills or knowledge is not attempted at all, and very little use is made of written work or the evaluation of practical work by the teacher – with pupil self-assessment, or peer-evaluation being seen as a substitute for rigorous assessment by the teacher. As a consequence, pupils in many schools are unsure how to improve their drama skills.

A recent publication by the Arts Council has identified learning stages in drama and this is proving helpful, leading to improvement in some teachers' assessment of drama.¹⁰

39. Drama, where taught separately, is one of the best taught subjects in secondary schools. In 2002/03, teaching in drama was judged to be good or better in four out of five lessons in Key Stages 3 and 4. Teaching is rarely unsatisfactory. In the best practice, pupils become independent, confident performers who work well together. They can organise their own learning effectively and explore complex social and moral issues. However, poor behaviour undermines their motivation in a small number of lessons, especially at Key Stage 3. This is sometimes the result of tasks which are insufficiently challenging or require too much repetition of simple techniques. As with all subjects, drama lessons can lose momentum when learning objectives are not clear or when they do not extend pupils' skills.

2.2 Reading

40. *A language for life* (the Bullock report) on the teaching of reading was published thirty years ago, following public concern about standards in schools. In some respects, there are similar concerns today.
41. One area of continued debate has been over the place and nature of phonics teaching in early reading instruction. Since the extensive investigations of early reading by HMI and others, in the early 1990s, few have doubted the importance of phonics in equipping pupils to read, and it was included as one of four 'searchlights' used by pupils in reading in the

¹⁰ *Drama in schools* (second edition), Arts Council England, 2003.

NLS when first devised. Since that time, support for schools has been increased by the provision of *Progression in Phonics* which has served to guide teachers as to a sequence and activities for phonics teaching.

42. Despite this, inspection evidence continues to show significant variation in the effectiveness with which pupils are taught the phonic knowledge they need to decode text.¹¹ In the schools with high standards phonics was taught early, systematically and rapidly so that pupils quickly gained the ability to decode text (and begin to write too), associating letters with sounds. Where standards were lower, expectations as to the speed at which pupils could acquire phonic knowledge were insufficient and the phonics teaching lacked systematic or full coverage of sounds and their combinations.
43. The inspection evidence also shows the importance of an emphasis on spoken language and the experience of being read to in many of the most effective schools. These help pupils develop a vocabulary and an understanding of narrative or the structure of other texts, which they need to supplement phonic knowledge in order to read with full comprehension.
44. Ofsted is offering support to the Rose Review of phonics teaching, which will take place in autumn 2005.¹² This will consider how teachers should best teach phonics and what guidance or resources are proving most effective in supporting them and producing the highest reading standards, with the aim of reducing the variations in the quality of phonics instruction identified by inspection.
45. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), published in 2003, found that, although the reading skills of 10 year old pupils in England compared well with those of pupils in other countries, they read less frequently for pleasure and were less interested in reading than those elsewhere. An NFER reading survey (2003), conducted by Marian Sainsbury, concluded that children's enjoyment of reading had declined significantly in recent years.¹³ A Nestlé/MORI report highlighted the existence of a small core of children who do not read at all, described as an 'underclass' of non-readers, together with cycles of non-reading 'where teenagers from families where parents are not readers will almost always be less likely to be enthusiastic readers themselves.'¹⁴
46. Ofsted's report (2004) on reading in primary schools highlighted the unacceptably wide variation in standards between schools that are often contextually similar.¹⁵ It raises questions about the action to be taken in schools where standards remain low. The report found that:

¹¹ *Reading for purpose and pleasure* (2004)

¹² The Rose Review is an independent review, headed by Jim Rose CBE, on behalf of the DfES.

¹³ *Children's attitudes to reading*, Marian Sainsbury, Literacy Today, 2004.

¹⁴ *Young people's attitudes towards reading*, Nestlé/MORI, 2003.

¹⁵ *Reading for purpose and pleasure* (HMI 2393), Ofsted, 2004.

- the headteachers of the effective schools were knowledgeable about how to teach reading and involved themselves actively in improving it
 - 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
 - the schools with high standards identified pupils' difficulties in reading early, tracked progress well and used intervention programmes wisely, before the gap between low-attaining pupils and their peers widened and damaged their self-esteem
 - the teaching of phonics was good in the schools with high standards
 - the schools which were successful in raising reading standards taught a broad range of strategies early on, including the use of words recognised on sight, context and grammar
 - schools which were successful in developing parental support for reading focused on specific initiatives that involved parents actively in reading with their children.
47. It also reported that schools were not always successful in helping pupils to read widely and for pleasure outside school. Concern about pupils' independent reading was also referred to in the 2002/03 secondary English report:
- The extent to which schools pay attention to pupils' personal reading varies too widely at present. In some schools, the absence of a reading culture means that few pupils read regularly for pleasure.*
48. Myhill and Fisher's review noted that 'there have been surprisingly few major studies into children's leisure-reading habits.' They quoted one recent survey which found that book-reading had increased over recent years for 10 and 12 years olds but declined for 14 year olds. The same survey confirmed that comics and magazines were popular, boys' and girls' preferences for fiction showed marked differences and the reading of non-fiction was not as widespread as often thought. They also considered the 'dissonances between school reading and home reading choices and experiences' (an issue also picked up in Ofsted's 2004 report), referring to one study which argued that boys and their parents tended to think of reading as print-based and that this was 'negatively associated with school'.
49. Reading is important, not just as a source of personal pleasure but for learning and individual development. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report said: 'Being more enthusiastic about reading, and a frequent reader, was more of an advantage on its own than having well educated parents in good jobs.' The report concluded: '... finding ways to engage students in reading may be one of the most effective ways to leverage social change.'¹⁶

¹⁶ *Reading for change: a report on the programme for international student assessment*, OECD, 2002.

50. Pupils' responses to inspectors' questions about why reading is important are illuminating. Most pupils, even those in primary schools, say that 'reading helps you to get a job', 'do well in tests', 'do well in school by teaching you good words to use' or 'helping your spelling'. Few mention its pleasures. One of the most significant passages in the Bullock Report noted that, when young people admitted to an adult literacy scheme were asked why, in their opinion, they failed to learn to read at school, the common factor was that; '...they did not learn from the process of learning to read that it was something other people did for pleasure.' Only a minority of pupils mention how reading develops an understanding of other countries, customs and peoples, such as the 10 year old Bangladeshi-heritage girl in a school on the Isle of Dogs who said that, for her, reading was 'the key to all knowledge'.
51. Strategies for promoting individual reading do not always sit easily alongside whole-class and group approaches to teaching reading. Most schools expect pupils to keep a record or journal of their reading, but the quality of these is mostly very poor. Pupils do not understand why they are expected to maintain them since most teachers do nothing with them. The Bullock report noted that the teacher who knows books well, who is aware of pupils' interests and reading background and who discusses reading with them will have a significant impact on whether the pupils continue to read for pleasure and the effectiveness of their reading.
52. Some teachers tell inspectors that teaching reading has lost its fun. It is certainly true that there is a good deal of uncertain practice, especially at Key Stages 2 and 3, as teachers try to develop shared and guided reading alongside previous practice. Is it appropriate or not any longer simply to read and share stories with their class; do they always need to analyse the text and set exercises? Is time for silent, independent reading regarded as good practice or not? Should teachers read whole novels with a class or is this a waste of valuable teaching time? In fact, Ofsted's evidence is that all these approaches, deployed appropriately, have potential, particularly as part of a systematic and balanced policy on reading.
53. Teachers often make use of texts without adequately considering their impact upon the pupils. They appear to regard texts primarily as a means of teaching writing: a poem is mined for its use of adjectives, metaphors and contrasting short and long sentences without attempting to engage pupils' personal response to the ideas and feelings it expresses. The text becomes a kind of manual rather than an opportunity for personal response to experience. This can then lead teachers to choose any text, irrespective of quality, instead of choosing the most appropriate texts for different purposes.
54. HMI investigated issues relating to pupils' independent reading in the 2003/04 programme of subject inspections, visiting primary and secondary

schools and discussing reading with pupils. Provision for promoting wider, independent reading was better at Key Stage 2 than Key Stage 3. This finding reflects the more positive attitudes of younger children, as well as most parents' understanding that they need to encourage and support their children's reading in primary school.

55. The survey also found that, in some effective primary schools, the study of whole texts and authors contributes positively to pupils' personal choice of reading, encouraging many of them to look for other books by the same author for their private reading. Secondary teachers, on the other hand, tend to focus on single texts and there is too little encouragement to pupils to consider a writer's other work. Few pupils in secondary schools in the survey were aware of other books by, for example, David Almond or John Steinbeck after reading *Skellig* or *Of mice and men* and they had not been encouraged enough to seek them out.
56. The survey found that attitudes to reading decline as pupils get older and that pupils in secondary schools find it harder to choose books they enjoy. However, this is not inevitably the case and some schools were successful in helping pupils to continue reading for pleasure outside school.
57. The survey also found that parents value reading highly and family attitudes have the strongest influence on children's reading. Pupils almost always mentioned their family as the greatest influence. Primary schools place much emphasis on involving parents of younger children in supporting reading. However, evidence from the survey indicates that teachers of older primary and secondary age pupils should build more strongly on the parents' role and should try to support them more directly. Pupils also mentioned friends as an influential source of recommendations. Schools might benefit from providing more opportunities for pupils to talk about and share books in small groups, including friendship groups. Fewer pupils mentioned that their reading had been influenced greatly by teachers.
58. Most schools provide a wide range of additional activities to support reading such as Book Weeks and the 'shadowing' of the Carnegie book awards. Some schools have also been very successful in introducing reading clubs and reading groups. A continuing problem for all teachers, however, is finding time to keep up-to-date with newly published writing for children and young people. Many schools are lucky to have perhaps one teacher who is passionate about reading, reads widely and often becomes a powerful advocate for reading within school. Without this, practice can soon stultify, with teachers relying on the same texts over a lengthy period. LEAs, local school library services and the national strategies can give important support by providing information about contemporary texts of good quality.

59. The survey identified a number of areas for improvement:
- making time within English schemes of work across all key stages to monitor and support pupils' wider, independent reading
 - improving links between Key Stage 2 and 3 in the reading curriculum and assessment
 - developing the role of school libraries and librarians in promoting independent reading
 - reviewing the approach to the whole class study of texts and authors to ensure that it contributes more powerfully to promoting positive attitudes towards reading.
60. The 2003/04 secondary English report drew attention to provision for **school libraries**, commenting:

Many schools have improved library provision since their previous inspection. In the best examples, libraries have become effective learning resource centres at the heart of pupils' learning where pupils enjoy access both to books and computers to support their work. However, library provision is unsatisfactory in a significant minority of schools.

Evidence from the survey bears this out. Secondary schools are more likely than primary schools to have a dedicated library area and specialist staffing. Nevertheless, there are weaknesses in both phases, often as a result of limited funding, accommodation and staffing. In too many schools, senior managers do not take a sufficiently close interest in the library or its impact on pupils' learning, despite the significant financial investment it represents. It is rare to find schools that have a clear programme for developing pupils' library and information skills across subjects.

61. A number of recent publications should help schools to improve and evaluate their libraries, in particular the DfES's guidance on schools' self-evaluation of library provision.¹⁷ Ofsted is currently carrying out a survey of good practice in primary and secondary schools.

2.3 Writing

62. Recent improvements in teaching have led to more systematic teaching of writing. Pupils understand more clearly the text type chosen and its key features.¹⁸ In their research review, Myhill and Fisher refer to studies of the processes involved in writing which suggest that pupils need four kinds of knowledge:
- good knowledge of the topic being written about

¹⁷ *Improve your library: a self-evaluation process for secondary school libraries and learning resource centres*, DfES, 2004 and *The school library and the Key Stage 3 National Strategy*, DfES, 2004.

¹⁸ The National Curriculum states that the form of a text will relate to the writer's purpose and intended audience. For instance, a writer may write to entertain or to persuade. This will influence the form or type of text they produce.

- linguistic knowledge
- knowledge of how to adapt texts for different purposes and audiences
- knowledge which allows the writer to manage and use the three other sets of knowledge.

Their review of the research shows how young writers tend to focus on the secretarial and presentational aspects of writing, a finding supported by inspection.

63. Monitoring by the QCA suggests that, under pressure to improve test results, teachers have tended to allow form and text type to dominate their teaching rather than focusing pupils' attention on the purpose of and audience for writing. Evidence from inspection confirms this. Yet many texts do not conform to a particular genre. Pupils should be taught to be flexible and confident enough to choose what is needed. One of the chief challenges for teachers is to motivate them to write. A pupil's first question should be, 'What do I want to say?' followed by 'How do I say it?'
64. Myhill and Fisher point out that concerns about writing are not confined to this country. A national report in the USA in 2003 claimed that: '75% of twelfth graders [age 17–18] were not achieving the required standard and that half of all college freshmen had difficulties in writing.' In this country, a matter of particular concern in writing is underperformance by boys. They are especially vulnerable when there is discontinuity of experience.
65. **Continuity in writing**, both within and between schools, was explored in the subject inspection programme in 2003/04. It found that few schools had given careful thought to continuity in assessing writing, although there was more consistency and continuity in approaches to teaching.
66. Weaknesses in the quality of transition between schools have been a concern for some time. Some of the schools visited did not use transition units at all to bridge the gap between Year 6 and Year 7. Primary schools which used them often received no feedback from secondary schools. Some of the most effective schemes arose from schools working together where transition units were part of a broader strategy for curricular continuity, also involving meetings between key teachers across phases, joint training and, occasionally, opportunities for teachers to work in each other's schools.
67. Increasing numbers of secondary schools pay attention to transition between Years 9 and 10, typically developing a unit of work on the media or beginning early work on a poetry text for GCSE. The main emphasis, however, is upon improving curricular continuity and preparing pupils for the GCSE course. They rarely give explicit attention to building up a profile of pupils' strengths and weaknesses in writing as they move into Year 10.

68. Training provided by the national strategies has improved teachers' understanding about teaching writing, and consistency has improved. This benefits pupils transferring to Year 7 who are more confident in responding to teachers' expectations because they are familiar with similar approaches in their primary schools. Although there was consistency in teaching writing within English lessons, few schools had extended such consistency successfully to other subjects.
69. In nearly half the schools visited, the quality of marking varied significantly between classes, both within and across year groups. Too few schools had established systems to ensure consistency in marking..
70. Despite improved methods of tracking pupils' progress in English, knowledge about a pupil's strengths and weaknesses in writing is frequently lost as the pupil moves into a new class. Where curricular targets were set, they were not always communicated to the pupils' next teacher and information about a pupil's strengths and weaknesses in writing was frequently lost. No amount of informal discussion will fill this gap. Teachers are often unaware of pupils' prior success in writing or their targets for improvement. In an increasing number of schools, however, assessment books, or samples of pupils' work are transferred, often supported by teachers' assessments, curricular targets and pupils' self-assessments. Where this happens, the new teacher can plan with a clear idea of what individual pupils need in order to improve.
71. In effective schools, subject leaders provide a strong sense of direction for the development of writing. Regular monitoring of English lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work enables them to evaluate provision and intervene where practice is unsatisfactory. Weaknesses in subject management in a minority of schools, such as the lack of a policy for writing or unclear improvement plans, inhibit progress.
72. The QCA's report notes that the national strategies have raised teachers' expectations about what they need to know about grammar. However, despite the support materials which have been published, the QCA's monitoring suggests that some teachers focus on grammatical knowledge without understanding how to place it within the contexts of reading and writing. Ofsted's evidence suggests that some teachers tend to oversimplify complex issues of grammar, teaching grammatical or literary terms superficially rather than exploring how language is used and the impact of grammatical choices on meaning. Presenting pupils with a simple model of grammar does them a disservice. Good teachers know, for example, that able pupils will want to understand why 'practice' can be used both as a verb (although with changed spelling) and an adjective, when they have just been told that it is a noun.

73. Recent research considered the value of teaching grammar as a way of improving pupils' writing.¹⁹ Some parts of the media interpreted this as an argument for removing grammar from the curriculum. In fact, the research pointed out the importance of knowing technical terms when reading texts and identified the benefits of work on grammar which focused on teaching different types of sentences. However, it questioned the impact of teaching traditional grammatical terminology on pupils' writing:

The teaching of the principles underlying and informing word order or syntax has virtually no influence on writing quality or accuracy.

¹⁹ *The effect of grammar teaching (syntax) in English on 5 to 16 year olds' accuracy and quality in written composition*, Andrews, R., University of York, 2004.

Section 3. Tackling underachievement

3.1 The 'problem' of boys

74. There is little overall improvement in boys' performance in English. Girls perform considerably better than them in English and the gap increases as they get older. This is not just a concern in this country. The PISA study revealed that, in all the 32 countries involved, girls 'reach higher levels of performance in reading literacy' than boys.²⁰ Another comparative report noted that 'The gender gap in attainment in reading, while significant, is relatively modest in England in comparison with other countries'.²¹ The United Kingdom was placed 12th and performed better in this respect than most other countries in Western Europe.
75. Myhill and Fisher's research review confirms that 'the underachievement of boys is a concern broadly paralleled throughout the English-speaking world'. They consider the relationship between gender identity and male achievement and review how boys sometimes 'negotiate their masculine identity and adopt macho values which reject the values of the school'. They summarise research which suggests that 'the association between the subject English and female identity does not help boys gain credibility for success' and review some of the strategies that seem to narrow the gap in achievement, many of which have also been identified by Ofsted.
76. Some schools have shown that it is possible to close this gap. All schools need to learn from them and should not be complacent simply because it is a problem shared with other countries. English and literacy skills are important for progress across the curriculum as well as for pupils' future life, employment and education. Many educationalists have identified the close link between competence in a home language and issues of self-confidence and self-esteem.
77. The lack of progress by boys (when compared with girls) in English at GCSE level is likely to be a factor in advanced level subject and career choices. Currently, only half as many boys as girls take an advanced level course in English. This is not acceptable when considering the nation's needs for the highest standards of literacy for all, as well as the need for male teachers of English and for skilled use of English in industry, commerce and all professions.
78. The gap between girls' and boys' achievement in English is greatest in writing, an area recently evaluated by Ofsted.²² Compared to girls, boys may be disproportionately affected in their attitude to learning and their performance in writing by mediocre or poor teaching and assessment:

²⁰ *Literacy skills for the world of tomorrow*, OECD, 2000.

²¹ *Comparison of education systems in selected countries*, Sammons, P., University of London, 2003.

²² *Yes, he can: schools where boys write well* (HMI 505), 2003.

Many boys seem to need to know that someone is watching over and cares about their efforts, to be able to see a clear purpose for their work, and to experience tangible progress in order to maintain motivation.

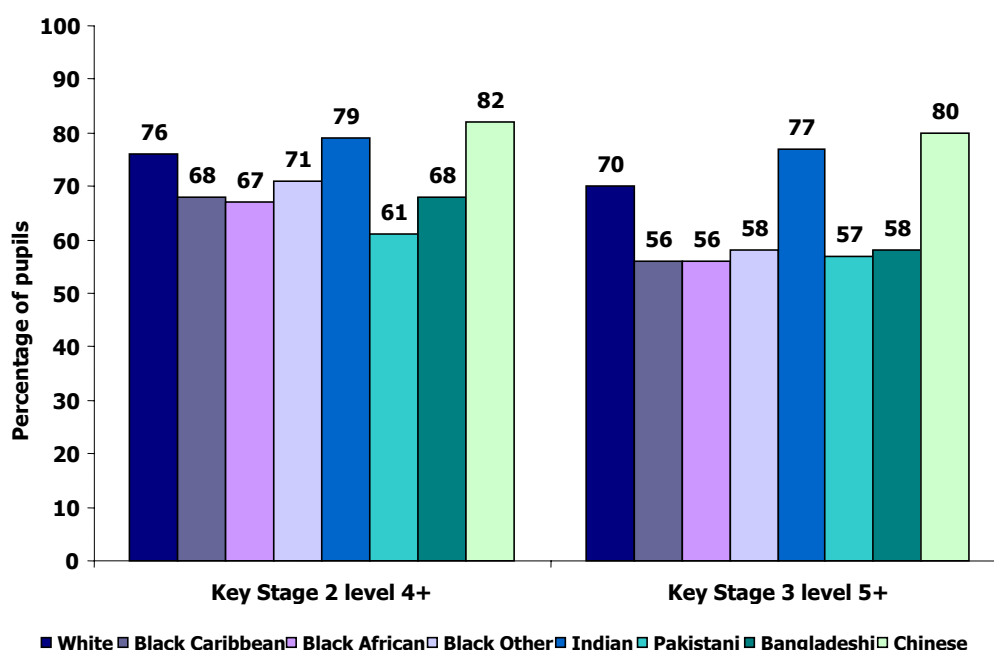
The report concluded that, even if it cannot be removed entirely, the gap in performance between boys and girls in writing can be significantly narrowed.

79. Some of the factors that most strongly characterised schools in which boys write well were:
- a school culture which valued intellectual, cultural and aesthetic accomplishment by boys as well as girls
 - responses to written work which valued diversity of style and approach, succinctness as much as elaboration, and logical thought as much as expressiveness
 - a good balance maintained between support and independence, with pupils always expected to be as independent as possible
 - choice given to pupils about the content of their writing, even when the form or genre was prescribed
 - efforts made to make writing tasks purposeful, through using writing to support thought, providing real audiences, and publishing and displaying writing
 - opportunities for pupils to write frequently and at length (often as homework), in this way developing their stamina as writers, but seldom requiring the rewriting of long pieces unless for 'publication'.
80. Some boys need more informed feedback from teachers about their work. They tend to feel that weaknesses in their writing relate to presentation and accuracy, even when it is not noticeably different from that of girls in these respects. Parents may also unwittingly confirm boys' concerns about the quality of their writing and handwriting. There remains much for schools to do to improve boys' confidence in English, especially in writing. They need especially to encourage boys to see themselves as capable of expressing meaning clearly and engaging the reader.
81. The report included a checklist for school self-evaluation. Although the report was welcomed by many schools, only a minority have used it so far to discuss the issues, clarify policy and evaluate practice. Some LEAs have provided detailed guidance, but too few have used the report effectively to encourage schools to analyse provision and identify improvements.
82. A great deal of research has been published on the subject of boys' under-achievement, including *Raising boys' achievements in writing*, a joint publication between the United Kingdom Literacy Association and the Primary National Strategy. The project evaluated the impact of activities in primary schools to improve boys' achievement. The report concluded that the project had made a difference to standards of writing and also to boys' attitudes towards it. The most significant factors were:

- the use of drama and/or visual approaches
 - the use of three week projects and longer term learning aims
 - opportunities for teachers to be innovative in teaching writing, as well as encouragement from the NLS to do this.
83. The issue of boys' underachievement in English, however, is not simply about writing. Boys tend to give up independent reading more easily than girls and, as they get older, seem to have greater difficulty in finding books to enjoy. They are also less likely to share or swap books with friends. They often enjoy oral activities and drama. However, the recent emphasis on teaching writing has provided them with fewer opportunities to do well in these areas, perhaps limiting their overall achievement in English.
84. Few teachers take a wholly balanced view of pupils' performance across the full range of English work in reading, writing, speaking and listening when assessing their work and determining ability groups (sets). As a result, some able boys who contribute thoughtfully in discussion are not allocated to top sets in English because their writing (and, more particularly, their handwriting) is seen as a weakness. Many classes contain a significant and potentially unhelpful imbalance between the numbers of boys and girls. Some schools give too little thought to the impact of policies that create low ability sets dominated overwhelmingly by boys. They need to consider reconciling such policies with the need to set high standards in English for all boys and to improve their perception of their ability. Schools should draw on assessments of speaking and listening as well as reading and writing when reviewing pupils' performance in English.
85. Schools also need to monitor and evaluate boys' progress more systematically. Too many feel that they do not have a problem with boys' achievement, despite test results showing that this is not the case; they are satisfied if the difference between girls' and boys' attainment is no more than average. The gap in performance between girls and boys in English at the end of Key Stage 2 is 11 percentage points, increasing to 15 percentage points at the end of Key Stage 4. Even if schools cannot remove the gap entirely, many have shown that it is possible to make a difference to boys' progress in English.

3.2 The achievement of different minority ethnic groups

86. There are significant differences between the achievements of different minority ethnic groups in English.

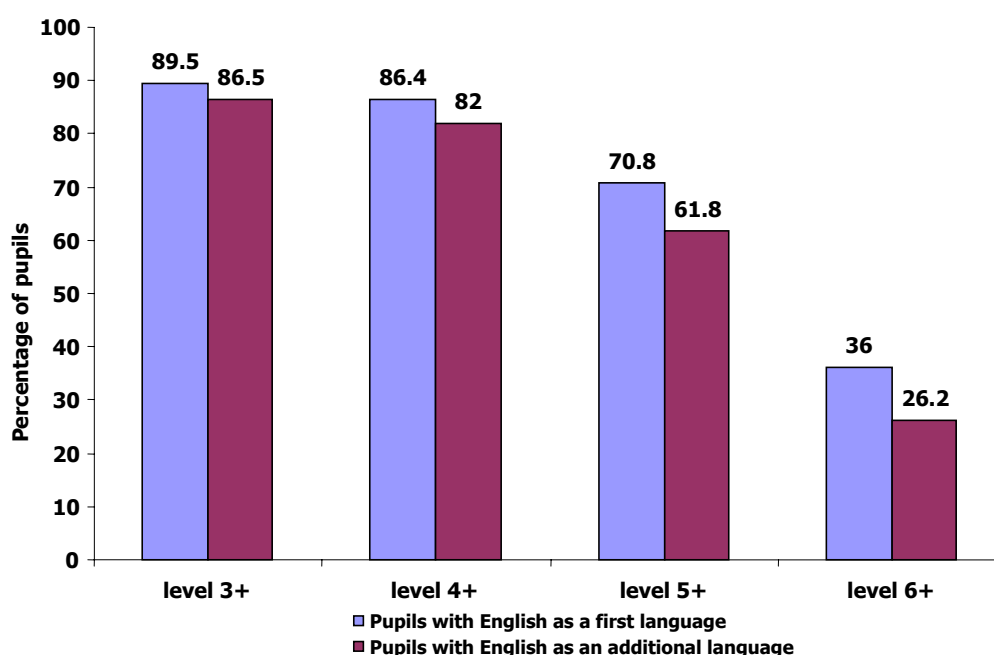
Figure 9. Pupils' achievement in English by ethnicity 2002/03.

87. The highest achieving groups at Key Stages 2 and 3 are Chinese, Indian and pupils of white British origin. The differences between the relative levels of attainment of different groups is significant. For instance, in 2003, 82% of Chinese and 79% of Indian origin pupils gained level 4 or above at the end of Key Stage 2; for pupils of Pakistani heritage, the equivalent figure was 61%.
88. The position is similar at Key Stage 3. The highest achieving groups continue to be Chinese, Indian and white British pupils. However, the gap widens in relation to pupils of Black Caribbean and Black African origin: only 56% achieve the expected level 5 or above. These pupils now achieve less well at Key Stage 3 than all the other groups, including pupils of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin.

3.3 Advanced bilingual learners and writing

89. Some pupils from minority ethnic groups are also speakers for whom English is an additional language. Figure 10 shows a gap of nearly 10 percentage points between the proportion of pupils with English as a first language (E1L) who achieve level 5 or above in English at the end of Key Stage 3 and those pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL). This is also true for pupils achieving level 6 or above.

Figure 10. Cumulative percentage of pupils reaching each level at Key Stage 3 in English.



90. While it may not be wholly unexpected that pupils who do not have English as a first language do not achieve as highly in English as those that do, other data raise more significant concerns. At the end of Key Stage 2, for instance, a greater number of E1L pupils, who reached level 3 at the end of Key Stage 1, achieve level 5 (73.5%) than pupils with EAL who gained level 3 at age 7 (68.1%). This suggests that even able pupils with EAL make less progress as they move through primary school than able pupils with English as their first language.
91. Those for whom English is not the mother tongue may find it difficult to make as much progress in English as other pupils. However, there is also under-achievement by some able minority ethnic pupils who have English as an additional language. The situation is complex but there seem to be two main causes of under-achievement: insufficiently high expectations by schools, and inadequate understanding of the particular language needs of these pupils.
92. Ofsted's report on the writing of advanced bilingual learners at Key Stage 2 complements DfES research, carried out at Leeds University, which used detailed linguistic analysis of pupils' scripts.²³ The DfES research identifies some of the key features of language which pupils learning EAL appear to handle less confidently than their E1L peers.²⁴ The report argues that EAL development is influenced by three factors: the type and amount of

²³ 'Advanced bilingual learners' are defined as pupils who have had all or most of their school education in the UK and whose oral proficiency in English is usually indistinguishable from that of pupils with English as a first language but whose writing may still show distinctive features related to their language background.

²⁴ *Writing in English as an additional language at Key Stage 2*, Cameron and Besser, DfES, 2004

exposure to English that pupils receive; their level of cognitive development; and their maturity. However, the study also confirms that bilingual pupils benefit significantly from the teaching they receive.

93. Ofsted's report found that the most successful schools:
- value diversity and actively acknowledge and build on pupils' cultural and linguistic backgrounds when teaching writing
 - are aware of the specific writing needs of advanced bilingual learners and provide specialist, targeted support to enable such pupils to reach higher standards in writing
 - use their Ethnic Minority Achievement (EMA) specialist staff effectively to disseminate good practice through partnership teaching and staff training
 - have a clear focus on speaking and listening, and use a range of methods to promote talk, develop ideas and help pupils to organise their thinking before writing
 - provide a language-rich environment and a wide range of experiences on which to base writing
 - demonstrate the processes and subtlety of writing by making explicit the processes involved in crafting writing
 - have high expectations for writing and do not accept level 4 as the highest attainment for pupils with EAL by Year 6
 - use school data well to analyse performance and set challenging targets related to specific linguistic needs
 - ensure that there is high quality marking and feedback to pupils that identifies their specific linguistic needs as pupils with EAL.
94. The report recommended that schools should be clearer about the specific needs of bilingual pupils and focus the support of EMA specialists on carefully identified pupils with EAL. They were urged to encourage pupils to talk about the writing they do at home and to forge closer links with the families from their school's various communities. They should also ensure that EAL learners have adequate time to organise their thinking and the opportunity to rehearse their ideas before writing.

3.4 The progress of high attaining pupils and those with special educational needs

95. HMCI's Annual Report (2003/04) drew attention to underachievement in English by some of the most able pupils, especially in secondary schools. Fewer pupils achieve level 6 and above in English than in mathematics in the national tests for 14 year olds. There has also been, at best, a small rise in the proportions of pupils reaching level 3 at the end of Key Stage 1 or level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2. School inspections regularly judge the achievement of gifted and talented pupils in English as weaker than that of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) or those with EAL. Able pupils are sometimes less clear than other pupils about how to improve their work, despite the fact that they are the very pupils most likely to understand and act on advice.

96. The Annual Report noted that teachers' planning has improved markedly in recent years, informed by guidance from the national strategies, and that they now think much more carefully about learning in English and about the structure and balance of work within individual lessons. Plans generally take into account the needs of SEN pupils. Schools have also focused much of their time and resources on improving the work of 'borderline' pupils, those at just below level 4 in primary schools and level 5 in secondary, through 'booster' sessions and other provision. However, few schools are able to provide such additional support for more able pupils systematically. Effective activities to extend their learning are still relatively uncommon in English.
97. Homework, used effectively, provides opportunities to challenge able, and other, pupils, for example through individual reading and research or independent writing. However, some teachers provide too few opportunities for independent learning, collaborative work or personal reflection. Guidance can be too prescriptive, reducing pupils' opportunities to think for themselves and develop their own ideas and, particularly, limiting the achievement of able pupils. A greater emphasis on whole-class direct teaching has had many benefits and has contributed to overall improvements in teaching. However, it sometimes means that teachers direct their lessons at the middle range of ability.
98. An Ofsted conference for teachers in 2002 considered many of these issues.²⁵ Despite many initiatives at that time, provision for many more able pupils remained largely unchanged. The conference identified a number of barriers to successful teaching and learning for these pupils. Many of these remain, including:
- rigid use of assessment data to predict performance
 - problems reconciling the aims of 'high culture' with the needs of pupils and the influence of popular culture
 - a timid choice of texts
 - narrowness in the range of the curriculum, which fails to develop pupils' ability in drama, oral work, media literacy and extended creative writing.
99. Provision for pupils with SEN is generally judged more positively in English than in other subjects, although this may reflect the amount of additional support provided. They achieve relatively well in English compared to other subjects. The proportion of pupils entering secondary schools below level 3 in English has declined slightly over the period of this report; however, there are still too many pupils who enter secondary school with low levels of literacy. This means that they are increasingly likely to struggle with the linguistic and cognitive demands of other subjects.

²⁵ The 2002 conference report is available on Ofsted's website.

100. Pupils whose attainment is below average are likely to receive additional support in school to improve English and literacy. Primary schools use a range of intervention programmes, including those provided by the NLS, as well as reading and family learning initiatives. The most recent Ofsted evaluation of the Primary National Strategy (2005) judged that many pupils benefit from these programmes and make significant progress. However, too many pupils receive support that does not meet their needs well enough, 'usually because teachers are not clear enough about what pupils know and can do, and what they need to learn next.'²⁶ In a small number of schools, both primary and secondary, some pupils do not progress because they are taught English mainly in groups withdrawn from the rest of the class, and sometimes largely by teaching assistants.
101. The role of teaching assistants during the literacy hour was described in the report as 'increasingly effective'. Many of them are responsible for teaching the intervention programmes and this work has improved in quality as a result of improvements in their specialist knowledge.
102. The position is similar in secondary schools. In the best practice, effective training and liaison with the class teachers enable them to work successfully with pupils, using the literacy progress units (LPUs) in Year 7 or booster sessions in Year 9. Increasingly, secondary schools organise support for pupils with SEN so that one assistant works full-time in a department, helping to promote continuity and progression in pupils' learning. However, some schools make too little time available for careful joint planning and, in some cases, teaching assistants tend to do too much for pupils, reducing their opportunities to work independently.
103. The Key Stage 3 National Strategy has provided a range of resources, including the LPUs, the Reading and Writing Challenge and training programmes designed to raise the attainment of low achieving pupils. However, schools with high proportions of pupils needing additional support on entry face particular difficulties in using intervention programmes effectively, since they often require significant additional staffing or other support. Some schools have built the LPUs into their schemes of work, using them in mainstream classes, but with varying degrees of success. Schools which admit large numbers of pupils in Year 7 with below average attainment in English continue to need clear advice about providing and managing effective intervention programmes for these pupils.

²⁶ *The national literacy and numeracy strategies and the primary curriculum* (HMI 2395), Ofsted, 2005.

Section 4. The change agents

4.1 The impact of the national strategies

Primary schools

104. The introduction of the NLS was followed by a significant rise in test results at the end of Key Stage 2 between 1998 and 2000, followed by a standstill for the next four years, with a rise again in 2004.
105. The introduction of the NLS led to more direct teaching, a clearer structure to lessons and more precise learning objectives.²⁷ The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching declined. The Strategy has helped schools to teach the full National Curriculum programme of study for reading and writing by identifying objectives and clarifying progression. Most schools have increased time for English through providing additional lessons for extended writing or guided reading. Indeed, in many schools, a significant proportion of the week is taken up with English and literacy-related lessons, especially in reading. Few schools, however, evaluate the impact of this extensive provision on pupils' progress in English or their learning more generally. There is a real need for many schools to plan provision for English as a whole, taking into account the literacy hour and other time spent on the subject. Too few schools, for instance, have articulated a coherent approach to reading which brings together the different elements such as guided and shared reading, reading aloud to the class, adults listening to children read, time for personal reading, additional support programmes for poorer readers and so on.
106. The literacy and numeracy strategies were incorporated within the Primary National Strategy in 2003 although, so far, this has not led to significant changes in many schools. Ofsted's most recent evaluation of it, while acknowledging the continuing slow improvement, judged that 'the subject knowledge of a significant minority of teachers is limited and holds back effective planning, teaching and assessment'. The report identified some of the weaknesses:
- inflexible use of learning objectives
 - inadequate use of assessment information and ineffective plenary sessions that focus simply on a review of content
 - insufficient time for pupils to work independently
 - too few opportunities to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills
 - limited use of ICT.

Many of these issues were identified in 2002 in HMI's evaluation of the impact of the first four years of the NLS.²⁸

²⁷ Ofsted has reported in detail on the impact of the NLS since June 1999.

²⁸ *The National Literacy Strategy: the first four years 1998–2002* (HMI 555), Ofsted, 2002.

Secondary schools

107. The Key Stage 3 Strategy was introduced for most schools in 2001. Ofsted reported in 2004 that its impact was being felt in almost all English departments through improvements in lesson planning, including the use of specific learning objectives. These were leading to greater purposefulness in lessons and more challenge for pupils. The quality of teaching had improved and pupils' attitudes were positive overall. The Strategy was having a beneficial, though gradual, impact on standards.
108. English departments' use of the Strategy has varied. A small number of them have remained aloof from national developments; too often, they are the departments that most need to evaluate their current practice. Others have adopted the Strategy's recommendations with insufficient consideration about how to sustain existing good practice. The most effective departments have reviewed provision, extending teaching, learning and the curriculum where necessary.
109. The Strategy has had a significant and positive impact on schemes of work. Guidance has enabled English departments to produce more thorough plans which provide a better balance of literary and non-literary texts and take account of progression. Throughout, the quality of subject leadership is crucial, giving colleagues the confidence to be discriminating, evaluative and innovative.
110. The Strategy's important focus on improving standards of literacy across the school has led to some effective work based on:
- good quality training for all staff
 - departmental reviews of the place of literacy within schemes of work for subjects
 - effective management support for literacy, often including a cross-curricular literacy group and literacy coordinator.

This has improved some teachers' understanding of the importance of pupils' literacy in developing their subject knowledge and to some effective teaching, especially in writing and the use of subject-specific vocabulary. Despite this, weaknesses remain, including:

- the stalling of developments as senior management teams focus on other initiatives
 - the lack of robust measures to evaluate the impact of developments across a range of subjects
 - a focus on writing at the expense of reading, speaking and listening.
111. The test results for 2004 at Key Stage 3 indicate that writing has improved, following a significant training programme for teachers.

4.2 ICT in English

112. Myhill and Fisher argue that ICT is 'altering the nature of English'. However, they make the point that not all children have access to computers at home and that the ways in which they use them is very different from use at school. They quote research identifying five ways in which computers can be used to support early literacy:

- to support writing
- to contribute to developing phonological skills and knowledge
- to enable more independent reading
- to foster social interaction
- to transform instruction through the use of the internet and email.

However, 'research shows that its use is still limited in all phases of schooling', despite the emphasis placed on ICT in national policy and funding and the increasing stress on it by the national strategies.

113. Ofsted published detailed reports on ICT in primary and secondary schools in 2004 which accord with these findings. The report on ICT in secondary schools judged that the impact of ICT on teaching in English was good or better in over half the schools visited and unsatisfactory in around one in five.²⁹ The report's main findings apply equally to primary schools.

- The use of ICT in English has improved, although the gap between the best practice and the rest is too wide.
- Most English teachers are now at least competent in the use of ICT and, as a result, use an increased range of ICT applications.
- Some teachers give too little thought to how ICT can be used effectively to develop learning in English. In a minority of lessons, tasks are not appropriate or sufficiently challenging.
- Most English departments use ICT well to support teachers, especially in producing good quality materials, record-keeping and resource management.
- Many departments use ICT effectively within individual units of work but it is not often integrated across the full programme for English.
- Progression in ICT skills has not been tackled well enough. Pupils repeat activities, often without any noticeable increase in the level of challenge.

114. The most effective practice was found where:

- teachers' planning focused primarily on objectives for English, and ICT was the vehicle through which the learning took place
- using ICT was regarded as a normal part of at least some English lessons
- pupils used it in collaborative tasks as well as in independent, individual research or writing
- a wide range of contexts were provided for its application
- pupils' ICT skills were well developed, through 'core' ICT lessons or through extensive use at home, allowing teachers to concentrate on the application rather than the development of ICT skills.

²⁹ *ICT in schools: the impact of government initiatives five years on* (HMI 2050), Ofsted, 2004.

115. In unsatisfactory practice, tasks were too difficult for pupils with poor reading skills and they struggled to locate and retrieve information from complex websites with dense text. More commonly, pupils who had considerable skills in using the technology were given tasks that failed to challenge them.
116. There have been few major improvements in practice recently. The evaluation of the Primary National Strategy reported that too few teachers use ICT as an integral part of their teaching. Its effectiveness depends heavily on teachers' confidence in using it. Interactive whiteboards were used effectively in the introductory and closing stages of lessons. However, the report concludes that 'the potential of ICT is sometimes missed... unimaginative software for tasks that are unrelated to pupils' needs contributes little'. The report on the third year of the Key Stage 3 Strategy noted that the lack of access to ICT resources for many departments 'adversely affects the implementation of the Strategy in many schools'.

Section 5. English in 2005: developing independence

*The value of English in the curriculum? What can I say? Without English, nothing. And without good English, nothing very well. (Anne Fine)*³⁰

117. The period from 2000–05 has been one of significant change in the teaching of English. The most important influences have been the primary and secondary national strategies which, largely, have set the agenda for developing the subject and have provided most of the guidance for teachers through training materials, courses and support from LEA consultants.
118. Recent gains in English are clear. Teaching is better and inspectors observe very few unsatisfactory lessons. The experience of most pupils is a broad and reasonably balanced one, less likely to be reliant on the whims and idiosyncrasies of individual teachers. The teaching of writing is sharper and more closely linked to the experience of reading. However, as this report has pointed out, there are areas that need to be improved. Above all, perhaps, there is scope, now that teaching is more secure and consistent, for more imagination, creativity and flexibility.
119. There has been continuing controversy about approaches to teaching, the curriculum for English and the impact of the national strategies. Myhill and Fisher, in their research review, referred to 'the re-framing of the subject as literacy'. The language of English is certainly different from that used at the time of the introduction of the National Curriculum; there is, for example, a generation of primary pupils who are more likely to talk about their 'literacy lessons' than about English.
120. When the National Curriculum was introduced in 1989, it defined the importance of English broadly in terms of communication, language skills, understanding of how language works and as a form of creative expression. This is still relevant, although the view of English as creative expression is perhaps less significant in some schools than formerly. The current *English 21* debate will no doubt draw in a wide range of views about the nature of the subject and whether it still meets pupils' needs.
121. Defining English simply is a difficult task. The author Ian McEwan has described the study of English, especially literature at school, as 'probably my biggest step towards mental freedom and independence. It was like falling in love with life'. Commentators often describe learning in English as a journey towards self knowledge. English is not simply about developing competence in the use of language. It involves making use of language to shape a view of the world and thereby to extend the range of possibilities open to others. The task of schools is to help pupils become

³⁰ The quotations from writers in this section are taken from the English National Curriculum, DfEE/QCA, 1999.

independent, so that they can make sense for themselves of what other people have said, written and done. As the poet Tony Harrison wrote (quoting from Cornish): 'the tongueless man gets his land took'.

122. An HMI visited a primary school in Tower Hamlets, London, which admits Bangladeshi pupils from the local estates. The attitude of pupils towards the school was very positive and most made good progress. The HMI enjoyed his visit and, as he was about to leave, asked the headteacher about the school's name. The headteacher gave him a copy of an election address to the London School Board by the Reverend Stewart Headlam in 1888, after whom the school was named:

*There are those who say that we are educating children above their station. That is true, and if you elect me, I shall do my utmost to get them such knowledge and such discipline as will make them thoroughly discontented...with the evil state into which anarchy and monopoly has forced them, so that by their own organised and disciplined effort they may live fuller lives than you have been able to live, in a more beautiful world than you have had to toil in.*³¹

³¹ With thanks to Stewart Headlam Primary School, Tower Hamlets.

Notes

This report draws on evidence from section 10 school inspections over the period 2000–05. It also draws on recent HMI surveys into issues such as the performance of boys in writing and the achievement of advanced bilingual learners. A third source of evidence is the subject inspection programme for English over the period 2003–05. This comprises visits by HMI to selected schools to survey issues such as schools' promotion of wider, independent reading. In preparing this report, Ofsted commissioned the University of Exeter to provide a review of recent research on the teaching of English. It also drew on evidence from monitoring by the QCA.

Further information

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