

# An evaluation of the contribution of the Basic Skills Quality Mark award to the standards and quality of literacy and numeracy in primary and secondary schools in Wales



...Rhagoriaeth i bawb... ...Excellence for all...



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## 1. Introduction

1.1 The National Assembly for Wales asked Estyn to evaluate the contribution of the Basic Skills Quality Mark (BSQM) award to the standards and quality of literacy and numeracy in primary and secondary schools in Wales.

The findings in this report are based on:

- an analysis of the inspection outcomes of 300 schools during 2003-2004;
- information gained from interviews with senior managers in 15 Welsh and English medium, primary, secondary and special schools; and
- information gained from interviews with representatives from four local education authorities (LEAs).

## 2. The Basic Skills Quality Mark

2.1 The Basic Skills Agency (BSA) launched the BSQM award for primary and secondary schools in England and Wales in 1997. The award provides a framework to help schools improve what they are doing to develop pupils' basic skills. This framework sets minimum standards for schools to develop effective practice in helping to improve pupils' basic skills. The Quality Mark is not intended to be a guarantee that pupils in a school with the award attain high standards in literacy and numeracy. The award demonstrates that a school has processes in place to help improve pupils' basic skills.

2.2 Basic skills are defined by the BSA as the ability to read, write and speak in Welsh or English and use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general. Other agencies, such as the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC)<sup>1</sup> and Estyn<sup>2</sup> use different terminology and definitions to describe literacy and numeracy skills. Inspection data on key skills has been used for the purposes of this report.

2.3 To achieve the award, schools have to demonstrate that they have 10 elements in place. These elements are described in full in Appendix 1. In brief, a school has to:

- apply for the award to their LEA;
- provide evidence to demonstrate to the LEA assessor that it meets the 10 elements of the BSQM at the time of assessment; and
- demonstrate that the attainment of pupils in literacy and or numeracy is improving.

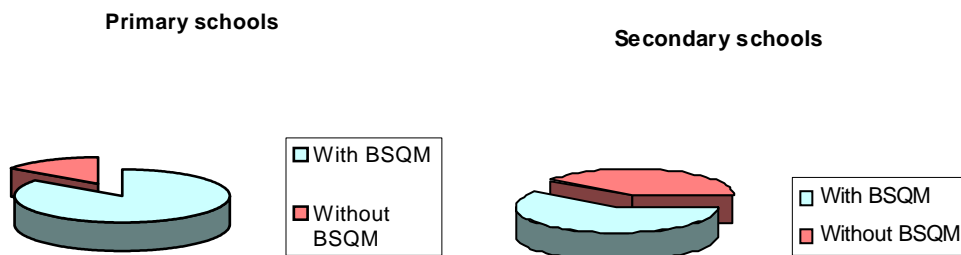
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<sup>1</sup> ACCAC uses the terms communication and mathematical skills.

<sup>2</sup> Estyn uses the term key skills, which include speaking, listening, reading, writing, numeracy and information and communications technology (ICT). The inspection data in this report does not include ICT.

- 2.4 The BSA provides grants to LEAs to assist them in their role in supporting and assessing schools. Following an assessment of the school, the LEA makes a recommendation to the BSA. Staff from the BSA monitor local education authority assessments to make sure that they are consistent between and across schools.
- 2.5 The Quality Mark is awarded to schools for a three-year period. LEAs are expected to monitor once a year to make certain that the standards are still being met.
- 2.6 If a school meets all the criteria of the 10 elements, they gain the award. The BSA provides each school with a plaque and certificate as well as free posters, stickers, badges, bookmarks and letters to parents and governors so that the school can publicise their achievement.
- 2.7 Chart 1 shows that, currently in Wales, around 85% of primary schools (1376 primary schools<sup>3</sup>) and around 60% of secondary and special schools (183 secondary and special schools<sup>4</sup>) hold the Quality Mark award.

Chart 1



- 2.8 Each year, since 1997, the percentage of primary schools gaining the Quality Mark has been much higher than the percentage of secondary schools. There are several reasons that may account for this difference. Primary schools are often more likely to be already carrying out many of the practices associated with the award elements. For example, most primary schools involve parents in helping to develop their children's basic skills. As a result, some primary schools have had less work to do to demonstrate achievement of the ten elements, and have gained the award more quickly. Also, some LEAs initially focused more time on encouraging primary schools to gain the award. This was often because other initiatives were already taking place in secondary schools.
- 2.9 While for the first five years, the number of secondary schools gaining the award was relatively small; the proportion has increased a lot over the past two years. In 2004, nearly nine times as many secondary schools gained the award for the first time than the number of schools in 2001. This recent increase may be due in part to more schools recognising that working for the award supports their priorities for improvement.

<sup>3</sup> Data supplied by the Basic Skills Agency, December 2004

<sup>4</sup> Data supplied by the Basic Skills Agency, December 2004

2.10 Despite the increase in the number of schools gaining the award, overall, the number is still some way from the target of the National Basic Skills Strategy, for all schools in Wales to reach the standard by the end of December 2004. The target date has now been extended to the end of March 2005.

2.11 After three years, schools can apply for the award to be renewed. Almost all schools re-apply and renew the award. In a small number of cases, schools let the award lapse. This can happen for a variety of reasons. Commonly, it occurs when there are significant staffing changes or because staff are preparing for other awards or inspection.

### **3. Main findings**

3.1 Overall, this research has found that the Quality Mark makes a positive contribution to the teaching of basic skills in primary and secondary schools. Working to gain the award has helped schools to reflect on what they do, clarify and improve their policies and practice, and better co-ordinate their efforts to improve pupils' basic skills.

3.2 The research could not establish a direct link between the gaining of the Quality Mark award and improvements in the standards of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. This is because schools are usually engaged in a range of activities at the same time often with similar aims. However, over recent years, improvements in pupils' achievements in literacy and numeracy, at individual, school and national levels, suggest that the Quality Mark can make a positive contribution to pupils' basic skills.

3.3 Overall, schools' perceptions of the Quality Mark award are positive. Most schools believe that the award provides external recognition of their effort and commitment to improving pupils' basic skills. Achieving the award is often a morale booster for staff. The award helps to demonstrate the school's ongoing commitment to self-evaluation and improvement. When senior managers have been directly involved in working to gain the award, their involvement has helped to promote and give status to the work, which has contributed to the school's success.

3.4 Working to gain the Quality Mark has helped most schools and LEAs to identify and begin to tackle under-attainment<sup>5</sup> in literacy and numeracy. The award has encouraged many schools to evaluate the way they analyse and use data as well as set targets for improvement. In some cases, this work has contributed to a better understanding of the individual needs and progress of under-attaining pupils. While individual targets are often set for under-attaining pupils, few schools set separate whole school targets for these pupils.

3.5 In many schools, working for the award has helped more staff to become aware of their responsibility for teaching basic skills. This is important because it means that more teachers are helping pupils to develop their basic skills. In-service training on basic skills for staff has also contributed to this awareness. However, few schools

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<sup>5</sup> By attainment, we mean how well pupils are doing, as measured in national tests and examinations.

evaluate the impact of in-service training on pupils' basic skills. This means they do not gain as much as they could from activities that have worked well.

- 3.6 The Quality Mark award fits in well with other improvement initiatives and processes, such as Investors in People (IiP), LEA literacy and numeracy projects, and school inspections. The work that schools undertake for the award helps to contribute to and complement their improvement priorities.
- 3.7 In many schools, work to gain the award has helped to strengthen partnerships with parents. The biggest improvements have taken place in secondary schools, where more parents are better informed and involved in supporting their child's learning. School governors have also gained a better understanding of the work of the school through their involvement in the award.
- 3.8 The Quality Mark does not guarantee that pupils in a school with the award attain high standards in literacy and numeracy. Neither does it demonstrate that other aspects of the school's work are without some weaknesses. Although there have been improvements in pupils' basic skills, overall, the standard of pupils' writing skills in primary schools, and the standard of pupils' numeracy skills in secondary schools remain low. Standards are unsatisfactory in one in twenty schools.
- 3.9 The Quality Mark award focuses on the basic skills of speaking, listening, reading, writing and numeracy in Welsh or English. These skills are essential to learning and everyday life. However, information and communications technology (ICT) skills also play an important part in learning, work and leisure activities. While this research did not include an evaluation of ICT, there is scope for this area to be considered as a basic skill.

#### **4. Recommendations**

In order to contribute further to effective practice in developing pupils' basic skills:

##### **Schools should:**

- work to gain the Quality Mark award;
- intensify efforts to improve standards of pupils' writing in primary schools and standards of pupils' numeracy skills in secondary schools;
- find ways to evaluate the impact of in-service training for staff on pupils' basic skills;
- continue to focus on pupils who under-attain in basic skills; and
- make certain of the involvement of senior managers.

##### **Local education authorities should:**

- help all schools to gain the Quality Mark;
- find ways to evaluate the impact of in-service training for staff on pupils' basic skills; and
- support schools in their work to improve the performance of underattaining pupils in basic skills.

### The Basic Skills Agency should:

- continue to help schools to focus on improving the performance of under attaining pupils; and
- give consideration to including information and communications technology (ICT) as a basic skill for pupils, alongside literacy and numeracy.

## 5. The standards of pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy

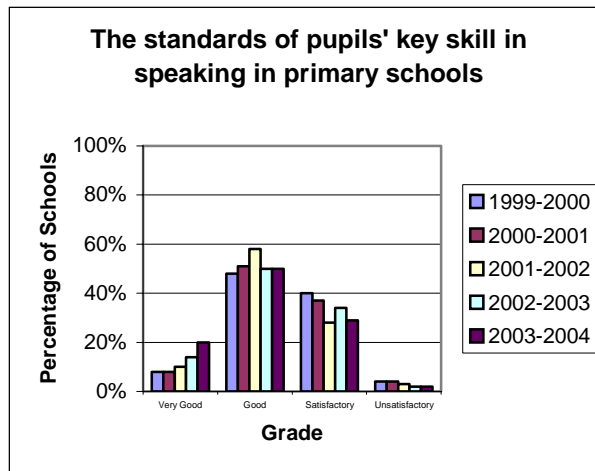
5.1 In primary and secondary schools, the standards of pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy have improved each year since 1999. These improvements have been brought about because, more and more schools have:

- developed clear policies on teaching basic skills;
- started to identify where basic skills can be promoted in their planning of the curriculum; and
- begun to recognise that every teacher has a responsibility to help pupils' improve their basic skills.

### In primary schools

5.2 Charts 2-6 below show how pupils' standards of achievement in literacy and numeracy skills in primary schools have improved since 1999<sup>6</sup>.

Chart 2



<sup>6</sup> Inspection data on key skills is not available before this date.

An evaluation of the contribution of the Basic Skills Quality Mark award to the standards and quality of literacy and numeracy in primary and secondary schools in Wales

Chart 3

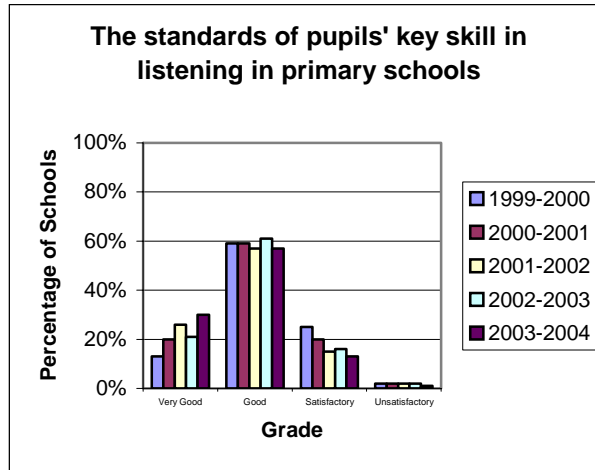


Chart 4

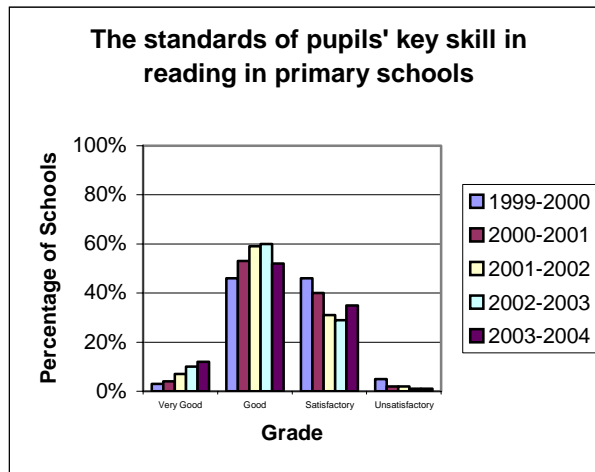


Chart 5

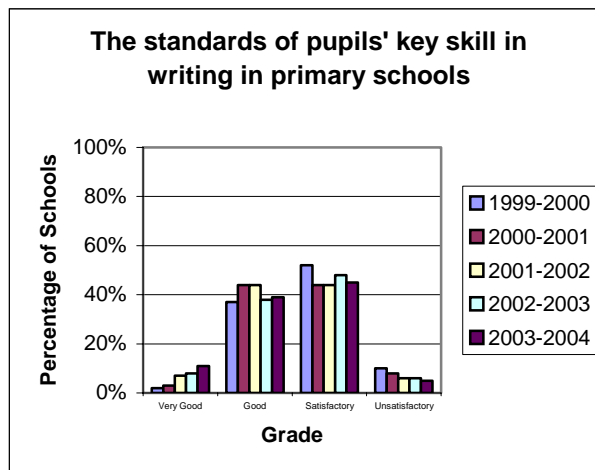
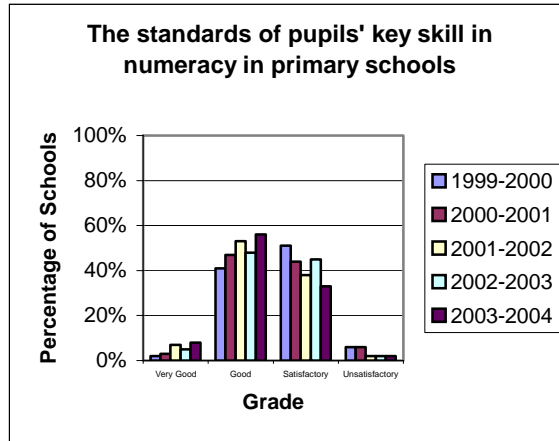




Chart 6

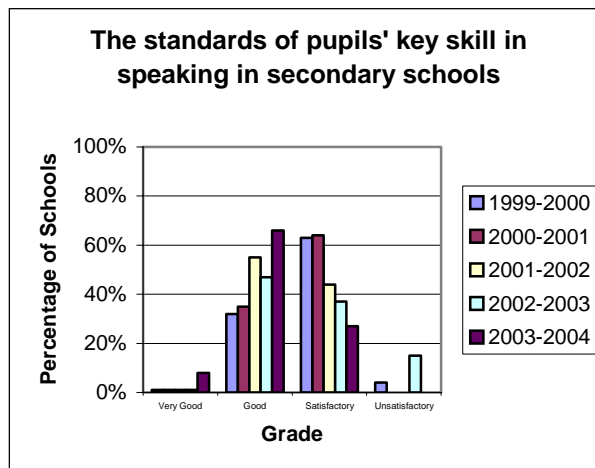


5.3 These charts show that, in primary schools, there has been a strong rate of improvement in the proportion of schools where pupils achieve good and very good standards in speaking, listening, reading and numeracy. There has also been a corresponding decrease in the proportions of schools where pupils have unsatisfactory skills. These improvements reflect the high priority primary schools have given to the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills over several years. Most recently, pupils' numeracy skills have been helped by a greater emphasis on number and problem-solving skills and better quality teaching of mathematics. Pupils' key skills in writing have shown the smallest amount of improvement: standards are unsatisfactory in one in 20 schools.

### In secondary schools

5.4 Charts 8-12 below show how pupils' standards of achievement in literacy and numeracy skills in secondary schools have improved since 1999<sup>7</sup>.

Chart 8



<sup>7</sup> Inspection data on key skills is not available before this date.

An evaluation of the contribution of the Basic Skills Quality Mark award to the standards and quality of literacy and numeracy in primary and secondary schools in Wales

Chart 9

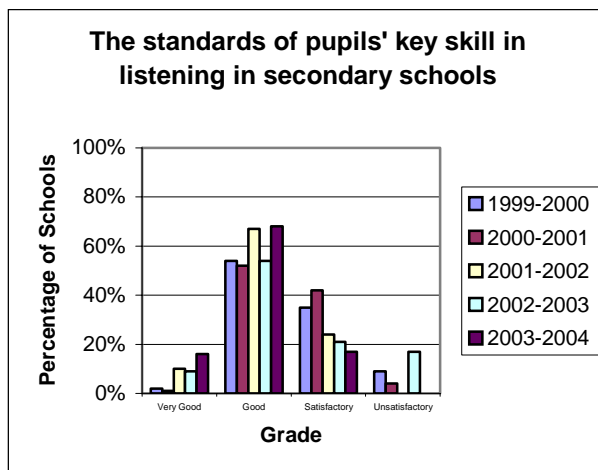


Chart 10

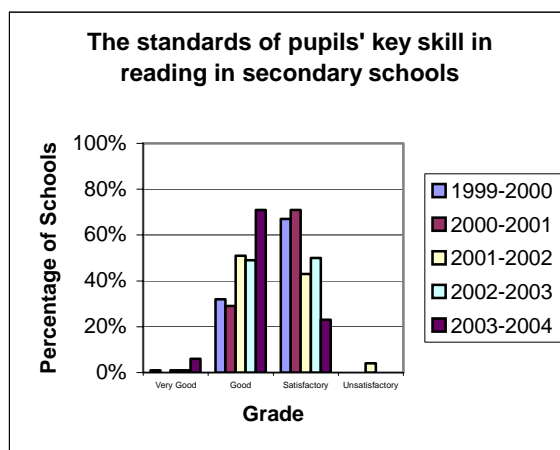


Chart 11

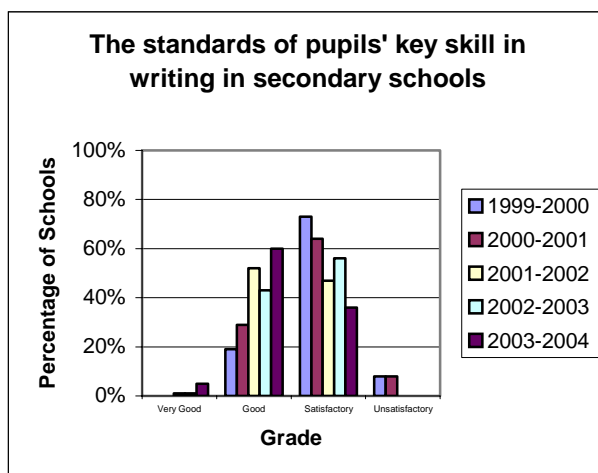
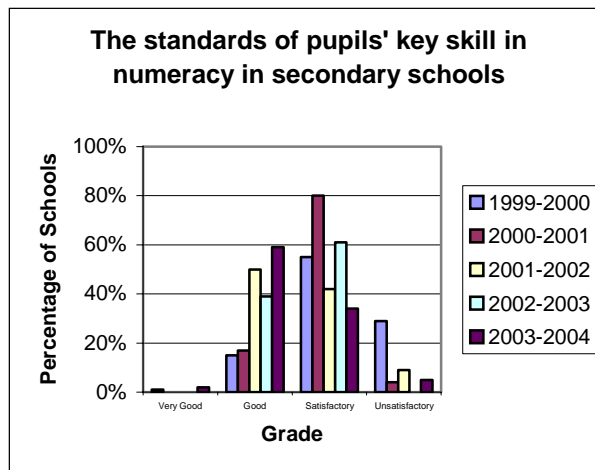


Chart 12



5.5 In secondary schools, since 1999, standards of pupils' key skills in speaking and reading have improved the most. To some extent, these findings reflect the priority that secondary schools have given to literacy over recent years. Pupils have also benefited from the sharper focus on literacy in primary schools, which has helped them when they transfer to secondary schools. The improved links between primary and secondary schools have also helped. Pupils' skills in numeracy are lower than standards in the other key skills. Standards in this area remain unsatisfactory in one in twenty schools.

## 6. The contribution of the award to pupils' basic skills

6.1 It is difficult to identify the specific effect of work undertaken for the Quality Mark award because this work cannot be isolated from the effect of many other related initiatives to raise standards. Hence, views about the links between the gaining of the Quality Mark award and improvements in pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are speculative. This finding is similar to that of other studies<sup>8</sup>. However, improvements at school and national levels indicate that the Quality Mark does make a positive contribution to raising standards of pupils' basic skills. Most schools that have gained the Quality Mark also support this view.

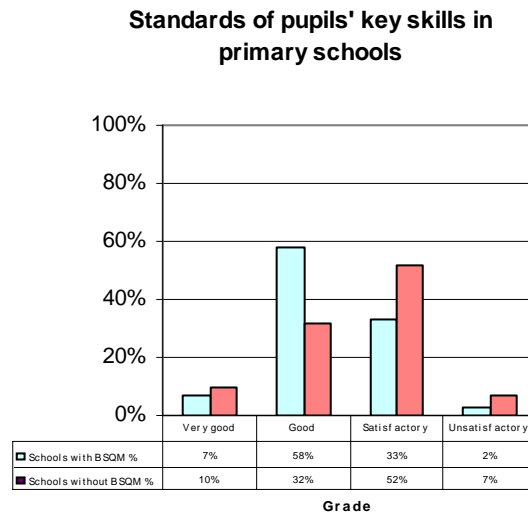
6.2 Many literacy and numeracy initiatives have taken place in schools in the seven years since the introduction of the Quality Mark. These initiatives include the 'Frameworks for Action in Raising Literacy and Numeracy in Primary Schools', the National Year of Reading in 1998-1999 and the National Year of Mathematics in 2000. There has also been a focus on improving standards of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum in key stage 3 through the BSA Strategic Intervention Grants (SIGs), which have targeted under-achieving pupils. At the same time, there have been other catalysts for change in schools, which have all contributed to improvements. These include the work done by LEAs and inspections and awards, such as Investors in People.

<sup>8</sup> Primary Quality Mark Research (2003), University of Durham

## In primary schools

6.3 In primary schools inspected during 2003-2004, there is a correlation between schools with the Quality Mark award and the standards of pupils' key skills<sup>9</sup>. Chart 7 below indicates that standards of pupils' key skills, overall, are higher in schools with the Quality Mark. At the same time, standards of pupils' key skills, overall, are lower in schools that do not have the Quality Mark. These findings suggest that the Quality Mark is a contributory factor to raising standards, along with other initiatives.

Chart 7



6.4 Standards of pupils' key skills in writing have shown the smallest amount of improvement in primary schools over the past five years. In the schools inspected in 2003-2004, pupils were much more likely to achieve good or very good standards in schools with the Quality Mark. Also, there were fewer schools with the Quality Mark where pupils had unsatisfactory standards. These findings indicate that the Quality Mark contributes to improvements in pupils' skills.

6.5 In most primary schools with the Quality Mark where senior managers were interviewed, staff believed that working to gain the award had helped to improve pupils' standards of literacy and numeracy. These improvements included:

- more pupils making better progress towards fulfilling their potential;
- better progress in the speaking and listening skills of target groups of under-attaining pupils;
- higher spelling and reading ages for the target groups of under-attaining pupils; and
- higher scores in class tests in mathematics for the target groups of under-attaining pupils.

In some schools, staff considered that the work had contributed to general improvements in end of key stage tasks and tests. For example, in an infant school,

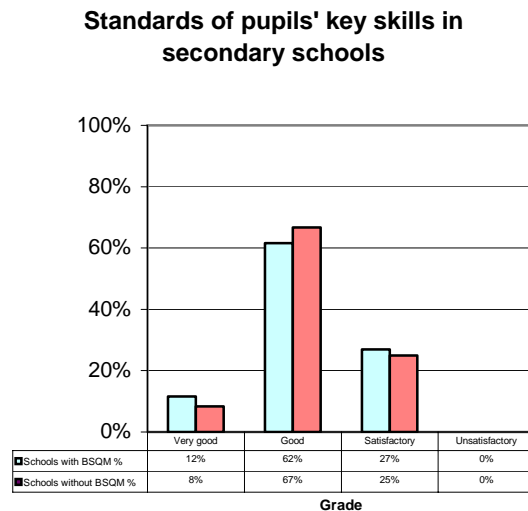
<sup>9</sup> These key skills include speaking and listening, reading, writing and numeracy.

the percentage of seven year old pupils who achieved level 2<sup>10</sup> in English, increased from 51% to 91%, over two years.

### In secondary schools

6.6 Chart 13 below shows that in secondary schools that were inspected in 2003-2004, there is no clear correlation between schools with the Quality Mark award and the standards of pupils' key skills<sup>11</sup>. However, it is important to note that the sample of data used for this analysis is small. The proportions of schools where pupils were judged to have very good, good and satisfactory standards were similar in schools with and without the Quality Mark.

Chart 13



6.7 Standards of pupils' key skills in numeracy have shown the smallest amount of improvement in secondary schools over the past five years. In 2003-2004, there was a greater proportion of schools with the Quality Mark where pupils achieved very good standards in numeracy. However, there were also more schools with the Quality Mark where pupils had unsatisfactory standards in numeracy. Although these findings are contradictory, it is important to note that the number of schools used in this analysis is small. Also, the award itself is not a guarantee of high standards.

6.8 In secondary schools with the Quality Mark, where senior managers were interviewed, staff believed that working to gain the award had helped to improve pupils' standards of literacy and numeracy. These improvements included:

- more pupils making better progress towards fulfilling their potential;
- under-attaining pupils moving up to higher ability sets for Welsh, English and mathematics;
- higher spelling and reading ages of target groups of under-attaining pupils;
- under-attaining pupils' greater motivation and interest in learning; and
- pupils' engagement in lessons due to their better behaviour.

<sup>10</sup> The level expected of pupils at the end of key stage 1.

<sup>11</sup> These key skills include speaking and listening, reading, writing and numeracy.

In some schools, staff considered that the work had contributed to general improvements in National Curriculum tests in key stage 3 and external examinations in key stage 4. For example, in one school, the percentage of all pupils gaining 5 A\*-G grades in GCSE improved during the time that the school was preparing for the award. Also, the performance of the targeted group of under-attaining pupils improved; more pupils in this group gained D-G grades in GCSE.

## **7. The contribution of the award to a whole school strategy to improve performance in basic skills**

- 7.1 Most schools used their existing improvement plans as their strategy to improve pupils' performance in basic skills but working for the award also helped them to improve the teaching and learning of basic skills. While schools varied in the way that they allocated responsibility for leading and managing the work, most identified a co-ordinator or, in some cases, a working party. Work was most successful when senior managers were involved because they helped to lead, monitor and give status to the work.
- 7.2 Schools are required to produce a whole school strategy and action plan in order to satisfy the requirement for the first element of the Quality Mark (Appendix 1). This strategy and action plan is to show how the school intends to improve pupils' performance in basic skills.
- 7.3 As many schools had already identified literacy and numeracy as priorities for development, staff used their school development plan (SDP) as evidence of their whole school strategy for basic skills. Schools valued the opportunity to use these plans as evidence, because this kept the requirement for additional documentation to a minimum. Only a small number of schools found it necessary to produce a separate strategy alongside their SDP. Usually, these schools' improvement plans focused on aspects of work other than basic skills. In these cases, additional information was necessary to demonstrate how staff intended to improve pupils' performance in basic skills.
- 7.4 In primary schools, the basic skills co-ordinator was usually a senior member of staff, such as the headteacher or deputy. In some schools, this was because the staff viewed the gaining of the Quality Mark as a senior management function. In other schools, the subject leaders for English or mathematics took responsibility. A smaller number of schools deliberately identified a member of staff without specific literacy or numeracy responsibilities. They usually did this to help to demonstrate that developing basic skills is the responsibility of all staff across the school. This was a successful strategy and helped to take forward the work in these schools.
- 7.5 Secondary schools also identified senior managers, usually assistant headteachers or heads of departments, to take responsibility for the work. In a number of schools, the lead given by senior managers signalled the importance and status of this work and gave the Quality Mark a high profile. In some schools, the headteacher had regular meetings with the basic skills co-ordinators to discuss progress. In a few schools, senior managers were directly involved in monitoring and evaluating the impact of the schools' basic skills strategy, through lesson observations. Usually, in

these schools, basic skills issues were included on the agendas of all school, department and governors' meetings as well as being represented in the SDP. This strategy helped to give a high profile to the work.

- 7.6 Some secondary schools set up basic skills working parties to co-ordinate and direct work. For example, in a Welsh medium secondary school, senior staff from different subject departments formed a basic skills working party. This group took responsibility for leading and monitoring improvements in basic skills throughout the school. Sharing responsibility across the school proved effective. In 2003, the school applied and was successful in gaining the Quality Award. In 2004, the inspection of the school acknowledged the school's good progress in planning for the development of key and basic skills.
- 7.7 In one LEA, all schools have been encouraged to identify co-ordinators for literacy and numeracy. This action has been part of the LEA's strategy to develop basic skills. In many cases, staff without responsibility for English or mathematics have been encouraged to take on this role. This strategy has helped to avoid the development of literacy and numeracy being exclusive to some staff or threatening to others who feel less confident about teaching basic skills. It has also widened the scope of responsibility for basic skills within schools. In this authority, pupils' performance in National Curriculum tests and other examinations in key stages 2-4 have shown consistent improvement.
- 7.8 Many schools reported that they had focused equally on literacy and numeracy in order to gain the award. In other cases, usually secondary schools, literacy was the main focus at first. This was because staff recognised that better literacy skills could improve pupils' achievements in all subjects. Literacy initiatives were already well embedded into school practices in some schools, so they chose to build on this work first. Some schools found it useful to develop numeracy by copying the model that the school had introduced to promote literacy. In this way, senior managers used strategies that already worked, which helped to make certain that staff would support the work.
- 7.9 In working for the award, many schools continued to focus on the improvements they had already identified in their school development plans. However, in some cases, schools found that in producing their basic skills strategy they needed to make some changes to teaching and learning. In primary schools, these changes included:
- the introduction of new schemes of work for literacy and numeracy;
  - new approaches to the teaching of reading, such as guided reading;
  - helping pupils develop a wider range of spelling and problem-solving strategies;
  - introducing a new handwriting scheme; and
  - the setting of pupils by ability for literacy and numeracy in key stage 2.
- 7.10 Some secondary schools also made changes to the teaching and learning of basic skills. These changes often included:
- identifying and supporting a group of pupils in each year who needed a boost to improve their literacy and numeracy skills;

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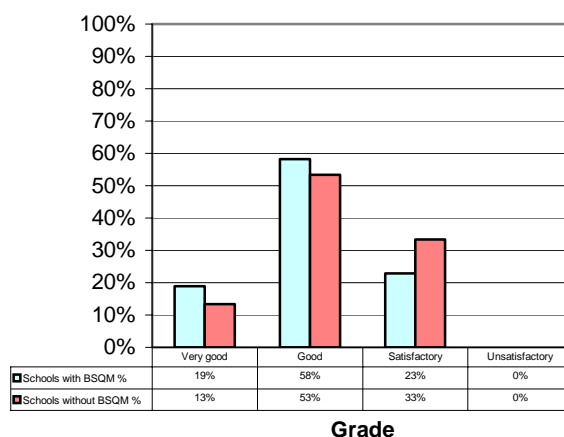
- establishing a whole school teaching and learning group in order to strengthen the development of basic skills across the curriculum;
- focusing on target groups, often in Y7, whose reading ages were below their chronological age; and
- tackling inconsistencies in the teaching of numeracy across the curriculum.

## 8. The contribution of the award to improvements in teaching styles and use of resources to improve basic skills

- 8.1 It is difficult to attribute improvements in teaching and learning directly or solely to the work that schools did to gain the Quality Mark award. This is because almost all schools that gained the award were already involved in other projects, often with similar aims. However, in inspections in 2003-2004, more primary and secondary schools with the award had a higher proportion of good or better quality teaching.
- 8.2 Over recent years, most primary and secondary schools have become involved in a range of projects and initiatives to improve teaching and learning. Undertaking work on 'accelerated learning' or being involved in initiatives such as 'assessment for learning', have contributed to the work they do on basic skills. Also, many secondary schools already made use of the Basic Skills Strategic Intervention Grant (SIG), to improve teaching and learning. In some cases, they did this without applying for the Quality Mark award.
- 8.3 Chart 14 shows that, in 2003-2004, in primary schools with the Quality Mark award, inspectors judged a greater proportion of lessons to be very good or good. Also, inspectors judged more lessons to have weaknesses in primary schools that did not have the Quality Mark.

Chart 14

The quality of teaching in primary schools

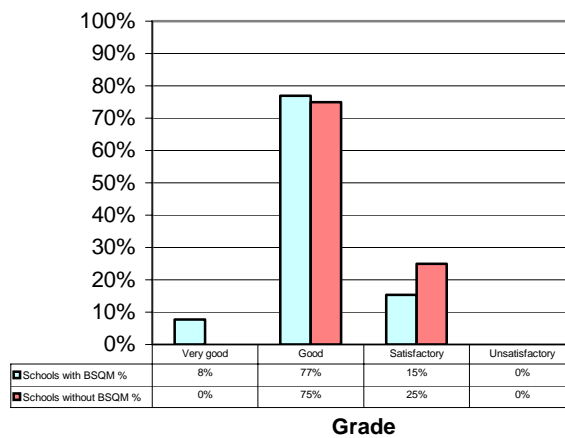


- 8.4 Chart 15 shows that, in 2003-2004, in secondary schools with the Quality Mark award, inspectors judged a greater proportion of lessons to be good or better. There were no very good lessons in the schools without the Quality Mark and more lessons with some weaknesses.



Chart 15

**The quality of teaching in secondary schools**



8.5 The weaknesses in teaching in both primary and secondary schools were often due to the use of a limited range of teaching strategies. Improving teaching styles is one of the elements that schools have to demonstrate in order to gain the Quality Mark. This finding suggests that the Quality Mark does make a positive contribution to the quality of teaching.

8.6 In almost all schools, staff reported that work to gain the Quality Mark had helped to provide a further focus on teaching and learning. In particular, primary and secondary schools commented on how working to gain the award had contributed to the following developments:

- a greater awareness of the need to teach listening skills to younger pupils;
- a greater focus on vocabulary, spelling and keywords to support pupils' understanding of ideas and use of language in all areas of the curriculum;
- more use of oral work so that pupils could discuss and explain mathematical concepts;
- greater use of mental and practical activities as part of an active approach to pupils' learning;
- clearer learning objectives that are shared with pupils at the beginning of lessons;
- improvements in the planning of the structure of literacy and numeracy lessons so that, where appropriate, lessons include a rapid 'warm-up element' to better prepare pupils for work;
- better use of learning resources that take account of pupils' different learning styles, such as writing frames, electronic whiteboards and number games;
- more use of a wider range of resources, such as the School Library Service; and
- a better understanding of the 'small steps' approach to teaching and learning in order to help pupils with weak basic skills make the maximum progress.

8.7 All schools found that preparing for the award worked well alongside other work they had identified as necessary for school improvement. Where schools were working to

gain the award, they were able to use the initiatives and projects they were already involved in as evidence of how they were improving teaching and learning. In most cases, staff reported that the work they did to gain the award complemented the work that they were already doing as part of their school improvement agenda.

8.8 In some schools, staff were able to identify how the work for the award led to changes in curriculum planning and the use of resources. For example, teachers in a special school now identify learning objectives for literacy and numeracy for every lesson. By introducing this approach, the school has helped staff to focus on developing pupils' basic skills in all lessons. In a secondary school, where all staff had received training to help them develop pupils' basic skills, teachers made better use of learning resources. These resources included writing frames and reading materials, in subjects such as science and history, at a level more appropriate to pupils' reading skills. This school found that better use of a range of resources gave pupils greater access to different sources of information, which enhanced their learning.

## **9. The contribution of the award to improving the skills of staff to teach and extend basic skills**

9.1 In many schools that were preparing for the award, the number of staff attending in-service training on basic skills increased. This was particularly the case in secondary schools, where more staff were helped to become aware of their own responsibility for teaching basic skills. While there are systems for staff to evaluate the quality of the training they receive, few schools evaluate the impact of this training on pupils' basic skills.

9.2 In order to gain the award, schools are required to demonstrate that they are improving the skills of staff to teach and extend basic skills. In some cases, working for the award provided an opportunity for schools to examine and evaluate the way they taught basic skills. For example, in a small infant school, staff considered the way they developed pupils' basic skills. This work provided a good opportunity for staff to reflect on the work already in place and its effect on pupils. It helped staff to realise that they could make more and better use of radio and listening stations as a means of improving pupils' listening skills.

9.3 In some primary and secondary schools, training for staff on developing pupils' basic skills has emphasised the importance of pupils having opportunities to discuss and explain their thinking. This work has helped teachers to make sure that these elements are a part of all lessons.

9.4 The most significant effect of working to gain the award for many secondary schools is the way that it has helped all staff to become more aware of their own responsibility for teaching basic skills in literacy and numeracy. In many schools, it has helped to overcome the view, held by some staff, that developing pupils' basic skills is only the responsibility of the English or mathematics department, or the special educational needs department in the school. Advisers in LEAs have also observed this change of attitude. This information has been taken into account in the training that one LEA provides for schools. As a result, this LEA is helping teachers in secondary schools to:

- know more about how their subject can contribute to the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills; and
- improve and update their knowledge. In some cases, usually numeracy, some teachers feel out of touch with modern methods.

9.5 One secondary headteacher was very clear about the benefits of working to gain the Quality Mark. He believed that there has been a noticeable improvement in all teachers' awareness of the need to teach basic skills. This awareness has helped teachers take more responsibility for improving pupils' basic skills, and has helped them look more closely at how they plan, teach and assess pupils' literacy and numeracy skills.

9.6 Almost all schools have systems in place to evaluate the quality of training that staff receive, but few schools evaluate the impact of this training on pupils' standards of achievement. While all staff were confident that in-service training had made a difference to the teaching and learning of basic skills, they usually reported improvements in teaching, such as better planning of basic skills.

## **10. The contribution of the award to the assessment and monitoring of pupils' performance in basic skills**

10.1 Overall, the award helped many schools to evaluate the way they analysed and used data as well as set targets for improvement. This activity helped some schools to improve their assessment practices and procedures. In other cases, schools gained a better understanding of the individual needs and progress of under-attaining pupils. While all schools set targets for pupils' performance, few schools set separate whole school targets for under-attaining pupils.

10.2 Elements 2, 3, 5 and 10 (described in full in Appendix 1) of the Quality Mark award for schools focus on assessment, target setting and monitoring of pupils' performance in basic skills. In most cases, staff felt that the award provided a spur for them to re-examine their procedures. In a few cases, this evaluation led to some improvements in the school's assessment procedures, such as improving early intervention strategies or providing more 'catch-up' classes for under-attaining pupils.

10.3 In one authority, where most primary schools and a high proportion of secondary schools have gained the Quality Mark, working to gain the award has led to:

- more schools closely examining performance data, particularly for pupils who are under-attaining;
- better use of performance data to help interpret performance and identify pupils' individual needs;
- the greater involvement of all staff, not only middle or senior managers, in analysing data; and
- better appreciation by all teachers of their responsibility for teaching basic skills.

10.4 In meeting the requirements of the award, it is necessary for schools to focus on improving the performance of under-attaining pupils. Many schools understood this focus. However, a few schools were less aware of this emphasis of the award. In

some cases they believed the focus was on all pupils and in others they thought the focus was on pupils with additional learning needs. LEA advisers supporting schools in working to gain the award, helped to dispel most of these mis-conceptions. However, in a few cases, even after gaining the award, some schools were still less aware of this important emphasis.

10.5 Many schools had already identified groups of pupils who were not attaining as well as they could and were supporting them through a variety of strategies. However, for other schools, although they identified and supported pupils with additional learning needs, they began to focus on and give more support to under-attaining pupils as well. As a result, some schools introduced individual learning plans for pupils who were under-attaining in the same way that they did for pupils with additional learning needs. These plans included targets for improvement in pupils' basic skills. Also, a number of schools started to provide more frequent reports to parents on their child's progress. In one primary school, teachers were making more regular, specific evaluations of pupils who were under-achieving in basic skills. These evaluations help them to plan future lessons and review the work undertaken with these pupils.

10.6 In a secondary school, an analysis of the performance of pupils who were under-attaining in literacy and numeracy indicated that some pupils in the targeted group were not making as much progress as they could. Further analysis revealed that these pupils also had poor attendance rates. As a result, the school is working on a strategy to improve the attendance of this group of pupils. In another secondary school, senior managers are personally involved in tracking the progress of under-attaining pupils. Each month, the deputy headteacher meets with each head of year to analyse and track the progress of these pupils against their individual learning plans. This action has helped the school identify pupils who would benefit from more support or whose low attendance or poor behaviour are obstacles to success. The work has also helped the school to work more closely with pupils and parents to overcome these difficulties.

10.7 While all schools set targets for pupils' performance in the core subjects<sup>12</sup> of the National Curriculum, only a small number of schools set separate whole school targets for under-attaining pupils. In most cases, targets for improvements in basic skills are expressed as part of the school's targets for English and mathematics as whole. This means that the focus on under-attaining pupils is less evident at a whole school level.

## **11. The contribution of the award to arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the school's progress and improvement**

11.1 Most schools considered the Quality Mark was a useful audit and self-evaluation tool. They used it as a process to review the teaching and learning of basic skills within their school. In many cases, staff recognised how working for the award fitted in well with their existing arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the quality of their work. In almost all cases, staff believed that the award demonstrated the school's ongoing commitment to self-evaluation and school improvement.

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<sup>12</sup> The core subjects of the National Curriculum are Welsh or English, mathematics and science.

11.2 A few schools reported that they had made changes to their monitoring and evaluation processes, as a result of work they did to gain the award. These improvements included the:

- tracking of pupils' progress against their personal learning targets for basic skills;
- monitoring of under-attaining pupils as a group within the school;
- setting of whole school targets for all pupils in basic skills and for under-achieving pupils;
- regular monitoring of work on basic skills by the school's co-ordinator or members of the basic skills working party, who reported findings to senior managers; and
- involvement of governors, who helped monitor and were better informed about the school's progress.

11.3 Many schools commented on the way that preparation for the award had provided opportunities for governors to be more involved and better informed about the school's work. In one primary school, the deputy headteacher co-ordinating work for the award regularly met with governors and teaching staff with responsibility for literacy and numeracy. They discussed the school's strategy and work in progress. In other schools, staff made presentations to governors. In these ways, governors were helped to gain a better understanding of the work that was taking place.

11.4 Almost all schools believed that the work they had done to gain the Quality Mark had a positive effect on the teaching and learning of basic skills. However, they found it difficult to reliably measure the effect of this work on pupils' standards of achievement. While there were undoubtedly changes and improvements in the practice of schools working to gain the award, tracking the effect of this work is highly complex. There are always many other things happening at the same time in schools, and these also act as catalysts for change and improvement. Measuring the effects of this work on standards could help to identify what works well. Sharing this information could also help to promote good practice in developing pupils' basic skills.

11.5 In some cases, LEA advisers found that supporting schools to gain the Quality Mark helped to strengthen the relationship between the LEA and school. It improved advisers' knowledge of schools. In some cases, this work provided a useful agenda that helped advisers to support and challenge school practices.

## **12. The contribution of the award to the involvement of parents in developing their children's basic skills**

12.1 Almost all schools believed that working to achieve this element of the award had helped to strengthen their partnership with parents. The biggest improvements reported were in the secondary schools, where more parents were better informed and involved in supporting their child's learning.

12.2 In order to meet the requirement for this aspect of the Quality Mark, all schools are required to circulate information to parents about:

- opportunities to become involved in helping with basic skills in the school;
- how they can help to support, sustain and extend the basic skills of their children; and
- the school's approach to improving basic skills.

Schools must also provide progress reports to parents of under-attaining pupils, at least three times in an academic year (this can be through formal and informal meetings as well as written reports).

- 12.3 Most schools already recognised the important role that parents can play in supporting the development of their child's basic skills and staff do their best to include parents. Traditionally, however, parents have been involved in their child's education in primary and secondary school in different ways. These differences are often due to the different nature of education in the primary and secondary phases, and the different opportunities for parents to be involved. For example, in primary schools there are usually more opportunities for parents to help out with activities in the school. Most parents of pupils in primary schools help their child by reading with them at home. Also, in the primary sector, family learning<sup>13</sup> is more strongly established. As a result, some primary schools can already be close to meeting the requirement for this element of the award. Indeed, for some schools, it has meant no more than collating evidence on the work they are doing.
- 12.4 In order to provide more information about the school's approach to basic skills, some primary schools introduced literacy and numeracy events for parents. Staff used these occasions to explain to parents what pupils would be learning in school and how parents could provide support for their child. In some cases, the introduction of family learning programmes helped to further links with parents. In one English medium primary school, the popularity of family learning programmes has led to a demand for a Welsh course for adult learners. In this school, parents are keen to learn Welsh so that they can help their children become bilingual as well as learn the language themselves.
- 12.5 In some other schools, working for the award has encouraged staff to provide a wider range of information for parents. For example, in a Welsh-medium primary school, staff identified the need to provide parents and governors with better information about pupils' learning styles. As part of this work, the school produced a 'Journey through Learning' booklet. This booklet provided information on learning styles and offered advice to parents on how they could support and reinforce their child's learning. In this way, working to gain the award has been of benefit to pupils, staff, governors and parents.
- 12.6 Most secondary schools acknowledged that they needed to do more work to meet this element of the award. In working to gain the award, most schools reported that they had been successful in strengthening the links that existed between home and school. In particular, staff considered that parents, who had been involved, were supporting their child more in the way that they had done, when their child was in

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<sup>13</sup> A wide variety of activities are identified as family learning. The most common family learning programme is family literacy and numeracy, which helps adults support children in their learning.

primary school. Most secondary schools also considered that the initiatives they had introduced had encouraged many parents to be generally more supportive of the school. These schools reported that they had helped to increase parents' confidence so that they were better able to support and help their child.

12.7 As a result of working to meet this element of the Quality Mark, some secondary schools introduced family learning programmes for the first time. Programmes such as 'Keeping Up With The Children' helped to involve parents in new ways that schools felt could be sustained and have long-term benefits. Some schools now provide more frequent information to parents about their child's progress in basic skills. Several schools have also started to provide family learning sessions so that parents can help their child improve their literacy and numeracy skills. This training has been most successful when it has taken account of the needs of pupils and parents. In these cases, the training has motivated pupils and adults so that they enjoy learning activities together.

12.8 In an English medium secondary school, the basic skills working party produced a whole school strategy to improve pupils' skills. As part of this strategy, staff identified a group of pupils who were under-attaining in literacy. In some cases, these pupils also had behavioural problems. As part of the school's strategy, the literacy coordinator introduced a weekly reading programme for pupils and their parents. As a result of this initiative:

- there is closer contact between home and school;
- information about pupils' reading preferences has influenced the purchase of new reading materials for the library;
- parents of pupils in the target group receive regular reports on their child's progress;
- many parents of pupils in the target group attend half-term reviews of their child's progress; and
- most parents of pupils in the target group have reported to the school that they feel more confident to support their children's learning.

Previously, the school's most frequent contact with parents of the target group had been about their child's poor behaviour. Now regular contact with parents is more likely to be about their child's progress. This has contributed to improvements in pupils' behaviour and their self-esteem.

12.9 There is usually a close partnership between special schools and the parents of children who attend them. However, in one special school, staff found that working to gain the Quality Mark meant that they could forge even stronger links. Staff helped parents know more about what the school was doing to improve pupils' basic skills. After a series of family literacy and numeracy programmes, they asked parents for their views. The school found that parents:

- had a better understanding of the contribution they could make to improve their child's education;
- were more aware of how improving their child's basic skills would give their child better access to the National Curriculum; and
- valued the way that their child was included in national policy initiatives.

12.10 A small number of secondary schools reported that they found it difficult to sustain the involvement of parents. In some rural areas, this was because the long travelling distance between home and school was a drawback. In other cases, staff believed that some parents were reluctant to become involved in family literacy programmes because they were embarrassed about the low level of their own basic skills, or had negative attitudes to education.

### 13. The reasons why schools apply for the Quality Mark award

13.1 Schools apply for the Quality Mark for a variety of reasons. Most schools value the award and believe that in working to gain it, they have helped to improve the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy in the school.

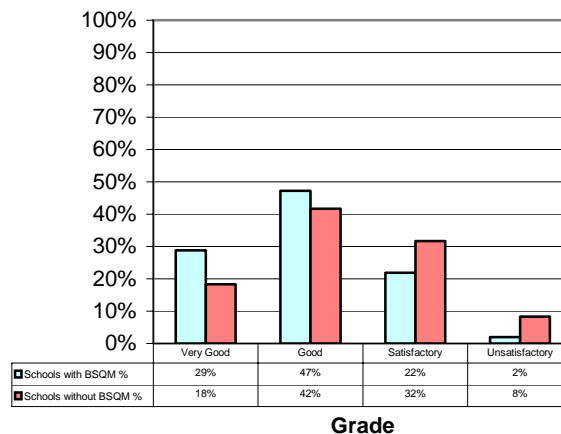
13.2 The most common reasons for applying for the award, include:

- external verification of the quality of the work of the school;
- acknowledgement of the effort staff put into improving pupils' basic skills;
- recognition of the school's achievements in challenging contexts;
- an opportunity to reflect on the work of the school; and
- contribution to the promotional marketing of the school.

13.3 It is not possible to claim a causal link between the award and high quality leadership and management. However, chart 16 below shows that, in the primary schools inspected in 2003-2004, there were more schools with the Quality Mark, where leaders and managers were judged to be good or very good. Also, there were more primary schools without the award that had weaknesses in leadership and management. The correlation between high quality leadership and management and schools with the Quality Mark may be because good leaders in primary schools are more likely to seek this kind of external accreditation.

Chart 16

The quality of leadership and management in primary schools



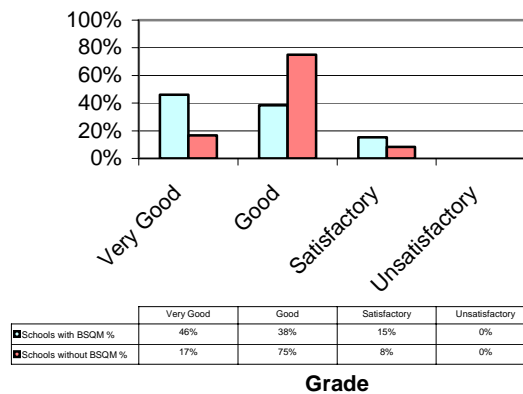
13.4 The relationship between the outcomes of inspection and secondary schools with the award is quite different. As previously stated, however, this sample of data is small.



Chart 17 shows that, overall, there are similar proportions of schools with and without the Quality Mark that have good quality leadership and management and many more schools with the award were judged to have very good leadership and management. However, nearly twice as many schools with the award also have some shortcomings in leadership and management. This finding may be because less successful schools have pursued the award as a way of helping them address their shortcomings.

Chart 17

**The quality of leadership and management in secondary schools**



13.5 Just as the Quality Mark does not guarantee that pupils in a school with the award attain high standards in literacy and numeracy, neither does it demonstrate that other areas of work are without weaknesses. However, the award does help schools to reflect on what they do and contributes to improvements in the teaching and learning of basic skills.

13.6 In a few cases, gaining the Quality Mark prompted primary and secondary schools to try for other quality accreditation, such as Investors in People. It has also prompted some schools to join national initiatives focusing on different learning styles. In one primary school, the Quality Mark was the first award of any kind that staff had applied for. While, they had felt reluctant to seek this kind of endorsement for their work, the headteacher reported that *'...it has given us the impetus to seek other accreditation, so I suppose it has been a sort of catalyst for the school. It has boosted staff confidence and we are now looking at other types of awards that accredit the quality of our work.'*

13.6 In a very small number of schools, the perception of the award was less positive. In a few cases, schools had applied for the Quality Mark only because other schools in their area had gained the award or because it was part of their LEA's school improvement strategy. In these cases, they felt the award had limited value and had contributed little to school improvement.

The 10 elements of the **Primary Quality Mark**<sup>14</sup>

1. A whole school strategy, including an action plan, to improve performance in basic skills.
2. An assessment of pupil performance in basic skills in the school.
3. A target for the improvement of the school's performance in basic skills.
4. Basic skills improvement plans for pupils underattaining in the school.
5. Regular review of the progress made by each pupil underattaining in basic skills.
6. A commitment to improving the skills of staff in the school to teach and extend basic skills.
7. The use of a range of teaching styles to improve basic skills.
8. The use of a range of appropriate teaching and learning material to improve basic skills.
9. The involvement of parents in developing their children's basic skills.
10. An effective procedure for monitoring the action plan and assessing improvement in performance in basic skills.

Schools also have to demonstrate that the attainment of pupils in literacy and/or numeracy in the school is improving.

The 10 elements of the **Secondary Quality Mark**<sup>15</sup>

1. A whole school strategy and an action plan to improve performance in basic skills.
2. An assessment of pupil performance in basic skills in the school.
3. A target for the improvement of the school's performance in basic skills.
4. Basic skills improvement plans for pupils receiving help with basic skills in the school.
5. Regular assessment of the progress made by each pupil underattaining receiving help with basic skills.

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<sup>14</sup> Basic Skills Quality Mark for Primary Schools, Basic Skills Agency 2004

<sup>15</sup> Basic Skills Quality Mark for Secondary Schools, Basic Skills Agency 2004

An evaluation of the contribution of the Basic Skills Quality Mark award to the standards and quality of literacy and numeracy in primary and secondary schools in Wales

6. Access to nationally recognised accreditation of these skills for each pupil receiving help with basic skills.
7. Access to training for staff involved in teaching or supporting basic skills.
8. The use of a range of teaching styles and material to improve basic skills.
9. The involvement of parents in developing their children's basic skills.
10. An effective procedure for monitoring the action plan and assessing improvement in performance in basic skills.

Schools also have to demonstrate that the attainment of pupils in literacy and/or numeracy in the school is improving.