



**Office for Standards  
in Education**

# **2004 Report: ICT in schools – the impact of government initiatives**

## **Secondary English**

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## Introduction

This report is based on subject-specific evidence from visits to secondary schools made as part of the inspection of the impact of government ICT initiatives between April 2002 and December 2003, supplemented by evidence from other school visits where appropriate. This contributed to the main report, *ICT in schools*, which is available from the Ofsted publications centre (07002 637833) or via the Ofsted website ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

## Main findings

- The use of ICT in English has improved since the publication of the last report in June 2002, although the gap remains too wide between the best practice and that most commonly found.
- The impact of ICT on teaching in English was good or better in over half the schools visited; in around one school in five it was unsatisfactory. ICT has had a positive impact on achievement in English in most schools.
- Most English teachers are now at least competent in the use of ICT and, as a result, an increasing range of applications is employed in lessons. The best work seen in English is of a high quality and is often found in media activities.
- Some teachers give too little thought to how ICT can be used effectively to develop learning in English, rather than in computer skills and so, in a minority of lessons, tasks are not appropriate or sufficiently challenging.
- ICT is well used in most departments to support the work of teachers, especially in producing good-quality materials, record-keeping and locating classroom resources and units of work.
- Historically, many English departments have been expected to deliver specific elements of ICT capability. As a result, many departments make effective use of ICT within isolated units of work; the challenge is to extend use across the full programme for English.
- Few English departments have addressed the issue of progression in ICT skills as pupils move through the school. As a result, too many pupils repeat activities from year to year, often without any noticeable increase in challenge or sophistication, either in developing literacy or ICT.
- Leadership of ICT in English is good in half the schools visited. Where practice is effective, this is often the result of the influence of one enthusiastic and knowledgeable member of the department who provides drive and direction.
- New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training has not had a positive, long-term impact on ICT in English in most schools. Subsequent school-focused training has often been more successful, since it has more closely identified teachers' existing knowledge and what needs to be done to improve it.

## The impact of the initiatives

### Teaching and learning in English

The impact of ICT on teaching in English was good or better in over half the schools visited; in around one school in five, it was unsatisfactory. ICT has had a positive impact on achievement in English in most schools.

Most English teachers are now at least competent in the use of ICT to support their work and many are skilled, especially younger teachers. English teachers now use ICT routinely to plan their lessons, prepare good-quality classroom materials and to deliver lessons economically and effectively. In some schools, the possible contribution of ICT to each unit of the scheme of work has been carefully thought through and documented, sometimes with templates or materials already loaded onto the network for all teachers to access. ICT is also used for a wide range of administrative and management tasks including recording assessments, accessing school information about pupils, completing reports and selecting pupils for teaching groups. Increasingly, teachers are using the internet to search for teaching ideas and schemes of work, especially where they are provided with their own laptop.

In over half the lessons observed, ICT was well used to promote learning. However, there remains a sizeable minority of lessons where ICT use was unsatisfactory and recent initiatives have not served to reduce this gap significantly; in some respects it has increased. In effective departments, the use of ICT is demonstrated directly by teachers and lessons move naturally between ICT applications and other activities. ICT may be used for part of a lesson, or by some pupils in a lesson, where and when it is appropriate, rather than by all pupils working individually at work-stations throughout a session. In the best lessons, ICT is integrated within the structure of the lesson and primarily serves learning objectives in English:

*In teaching a Year 11 GCSE class studying 'Romeo and Juliet', the newly appointed head of department integrated the use of ICT as an aid to teaching unobtrusively and in a range of effective ways. He first used the interactive whiteboard to display quotations from the play to illustrate the contrasting tones of bawdy and tragic seriousness, stimulating discussion and then colour marking the differing tones when consensus was reached. Romeo's speech on first seeing Juliet was then used to identify words giving an image of beauty, purity and brightness. The speech was played to the class from a downloaded clip of a video and pairs of pupils did their own text marking on hard copies. The collation of the outcomes of their discussion was again done on the whiteboard in plenary, using colour to highlight key words. Following this, attention shifted to the acting and directing of the speech. A clip of film showing the reconstructed Globe Theatre was used and pupils worked in pairs with diagrams of the Globe to decide how they would direct a speech. Throughout the lesson ICT was employed to add interest, colour and life to both the play and the activities on it, but the focus of attention was always on the English objectives.*

In effective departments, teachers' planning focuses on English objectives and in their interactions with pupils it is the English content which promotes discussion. ICT is the vehicle through which learning in English is to be achieved. Tasks given to pupils motivate them by using ICT appropriately, for instance to focus on purpose and audience for writing or on text manipulation and experimentation in layout and presentation. In one school, pupils were engaged in analysing and designing advertisements. They used the internet to find suitable images for their advertisements, manipulating them with some skill and adding captions. They then worked on designing questionnaires for other pupils about the impact of advertising. ICT was well used to allow pupils to play around with the different effects of text and image that could be created. Pupils were able to evaluate impact and consider the audience reaction to their advertisements, as well as using ICT to create a text that was firmly aimed at a particular audience.

GCSE media studies lessons and media activities in English often make very good use of ICT, as in this example:

*In one school, a lower set Year 10 class was engaged in study of the Spielberg film 'Minority Report'. The teacher deployed ICT to very good effect in the lesson, both using extracts from the film (zooming in on close-ups and freezing the film for discussion of camera techniques or special effects) and simultaneously deploying the Writers' Toolkit program to model the writing of notes as a scene from the film was being watched. The effective use of ICT in this lesson led to a detailed analysis and discussion of film effects that would not have been possible through any other medium.*

Some successful uses of ICT in English occur in lessons that are highly innovative and original. However, the most effective uses of ICT sometimes occur within familiar contexts but the results are outstanding because of the impact of the teaching on the quality of the pupils' work:

*The lesson was a Year 10 mixed-ability media studies class in an inner-city school in the Midlands. Pupils had analysed the content and format of a range of magazines aimed at young people and were now working on an A3 spread for their own magazine. By the end of the lesson, pupils showed that they could: set up an A3 page; insert photos into text boxes and crop, where necessary; present a picture underneath the text as watermark; amend pictures through fading one side of the picture; scan photos into their file; insert bubbles into pictures; and add distorting effects to their design, where appropriate. What distinguished this lesson from many others like it were: a high level of teacher knowledge; time (in a two-hour lesson) for pupils to think about and improve their work; an effective balance in the lesson between work using the computer and whole-class discussion away from the machines; and good use of the technology for specific subject aims. This resulted in high-quality products that matched professional standards more generally found only outside school.*

In contrast, where teaching using ICT is unsatisfactory, there has usually been too little thought given to how the facilities of ICT can help to meet English objectives. Teachers do not always set ICT tasks in English that are appropriate and challenging. In one

lesson in four, the tasks set were in some respects unsatisfactory. On occasion, tasks were too difficult for pupils with poor reading skills. In these lessons, pupils struggled to locate information from complex websites and were unable to retrieve information because of the density of the text. More commonly, however, the level of challenge was too low for pupils who already possessed considerable skills in using the technology. In too many lessons, teachers failed to plan effectively for the wide range of ICT ability in the class and were not able to extend the most skilled users of ICT. Such teachers need to find out more about what pupils already know and can do on computers and what access they have to ICT at home.

The use of ICT remains a motivating factor for many pupils in English; however, teachers need to understand that a badly behaved class does not improve merely by being seated in front of computers. Some ICT tasks in English remain limited and fail to extend pupils' learning. Sometimes pupils spend time simply reading material on screen which would be better accessed from the printed page. On occasion, pupils work individually on computers on tasks which would benefit from discussion, either with the whole class or in pairs and groups. For example, magazines or brochures are produced by each pupil when collaborative work would be more appropriate.

At times, the use of ICT is actually detrimental to pupils' learning in English. This occurs where teachers have not considered carefully enough how the technology will extend knowledge, skills and understanding in the subject. Is presentational software the best way of making notes on a set text? Should pupils be asked to carry out internet research if the information is already readily available in a different form in school?

### **Standards and achievement in English**

There is considerable variation between schools in the extent to which the use of ICT has improved standards in English, although overall the impact has been positive. The different impact on schools is often related to issues like levels of access to facilities, the expertise of staff in making effective use of the technology, a good scheme of work, and the quality of leadership.

Where the impact of ICT on achievement in English is very good, there are a number of common characteristics. Firstly, use of ICT is regarded as normal and a part of the working environment of at least some English lessons. Pupils are equally likely to use it in a collaborative activity as to be engaged on independent, individual research or writing. Secondly, the range of uses of ICT in English in these schools is wider than that usually seen. Not only will pupils routinely word process much of their work, or use desktop publishing (DTP) packages to display it to best effect, but they will also use ICT to import or scan images or use digital cameras imaginatively to construct visual effects, for example in producing brochures of the local area for visitors. They may use email regularly to exchange work in progress with other pupils or staff, or to communicate beyond the school to locate recent materials or data. Thus they select with some skill and independence sources of information to support their studies. Thirdly, in all the examples where ICT was making a very good contribution to English achievement, the pupils' own ICT skills were well developed, through 'core' ICT lessons in the secondary

school or feeder primary school or through extensive use at home. This left English teachers to concentrate on the application of ICT skills and not their development.

ICT is often well used to locate information speedily and to access a wide range of different texts online. The worldwide web offers ready access to up-to-date information which can support many aspects of work in English. The best work in English in this context occurs where teachers already have some knowledge of the website and are able to ensure that pupils make the best use of the time available. In good lessons, the internet and selected CD-ROMs are used by pupils to add breadth to background research, for example to provide contextual or biographical background to literary studies.

*A middle ability Year 8 class were studying a Robert Swindell novel with a Viking setting. The teacher took the pupils into the ICT suite to research this background to the novel. He started by using a multimedia presentation on the 'ground rules' for internet use, and how to conduct a search, He asked pupils to log on to their own machines and use 'Vikings' as a search word, making the point forcibly that there are over a million possible sites for this very general topic. He then went online on the big screen, accessing a search engine to demonstrate very clearly how he would narrow down a search to manageable proportions. Pupils quickly came to see that the process of using search criteria is applicable to any such task. With this introduction, pupils were then able to make their own searches for information on specific aspects of Viking life which would enrich their reading of the novel. The lesson was effective in simultaneously building the skills of web search and deepening understanding of the literary text.*

The best work on using the internet also involves pupils in evaluating different sites against clear criteria such as purpose, use of language and audience. This sometimes extends into work on producing a school or subject intranet site, for instance writing web pages to inform Year 6 pupils about their new school.

ICT makes a positive contribution to pupils' writing in many schools. Word-processing and desktop publishing are well used by many pupils to improve the quality and presentation of their work, and to develop understanding of how design and other features affect the way texts are received. The best practice encourages pupils to use the computer for composition and to edit, copy, delete and move text around. The technology enables pupils to achieve high standards in producing newspapers, magazines, leaflets and posters. However, it remains the case that too much time is spent using the computer to word process already completed (and corrected) work. At best, some of this work is proofread, but not redrafted. Some instances were observed of pupils copying on to computer text that had been word processed at home; they had not been informed how to send work from home or how to copy it on to a disk, leading to considerable waste of time in class. Similarly, in too many lessons, newspaper work involves pupils in using valuable classroom time in endless searches for visual material, where all the pupils' efforts go into finding suitable clipart images while giving too little attention to the quality of language in their text. This approach can lead to time wasted, for example producing wanted posters for literary characters as part of GCSE study.



ICT is often well used to improve the quality of work of pupils with special educational needs (SEN). The advantages are well known; pupils can work at their own pace, motivation is increased and learning becomes exciting. Some independent learning programmes were observed being used successfully in English, or within SEN withdrawal sessions, and these clearly helped to improve pupils' basic skills. This is especially so where such use is integrated with direct teaching and collaborative discussion. In less successful lessons, pupils with SEN spend too much time working on their own or have limited access to the most inspiring texts. Pupils with SEN achieved well when ICT was used to challenge and expand their thinking, while addressing weaknesses in basic literacy:

*The lowest Year 9 English set, most of whom were on the SEN register or had statements of special educational needs, started the lesson with a thesaurus game, with 'merits' for those finding the best synonyms for words in given sentences. The sentences were on the theme of war, and words such as 'pummel' and 'lacerate' were chosen by pupils and discussed. This starter primed pupils for the next stage of the lesson, when Goya's painting 'The Slaughter' was displayed on the interactive whiteboard. Pupils suggested words and sentences to describe what they could see. The teacher then began a 'shared writing' description of the painting, taking suggestions from all the pupils as the description was gradually built up and refined. The atmosphere throughout was lively and interactive, with enthusiasm for words and phrases shown by teacher and pupils alike. The vividness of the description was enhanced by the quality of the reproduction of the painting, while the whiteboard was well used for the shared writing task, allowing the process of drafting and editing to be modelled effectively.*

Such good examples notwithstanding, in some cases ICT restricts achievement in English, since pupils are spending too long on computers and time is not always productively used. This is because teachers are not sufficiently clear about the English objectives in these lessons and intervene too infrequently while pupils are working on computers.

## **Implementation in schools**

### **Leadership and management**

Leadership of ICT in English is good in half the schools visited. However, departments do not always share good practice effectively and variability in quality occurs within schools as well as between them; management of ICT was unsatisfactory in one department in five of the schools visited.

In many departments, leadership in ICT is provided by one enthusiastic, knowledgeable member of the department who possesses drive and expertise. This is not necessarily the head of department and is often a young and comparatively inexperienced teacher. The best practice occurs where leadership provides clear direction to the department's use of ICT, with a good understanding of the need for continuing support and development.

In effective departments, the particular contribution of ICT to learning in English has been discussed, agreed and recorded in policy statements, with the result that it is used only where it will meet English objectives. In good departments, there is a strong sense of teamwork, derived from good leadership and management, and a clear vision of the department moving forward together. Such departments are also open to outside influences, such as training opportunities, the arrival of a newly qualified teacher, or advice from the LEA or professional association publications, and easily integrate such influences into their thinking.

Where ICT is well used, it has led to a greater variety of approach in many lessons, better support for individual pupils with SEN and more emphasis on the study of moving image texts. Effective managers have reviewed curriculum provision as school and departmental circumstances change. Historically, many English departments have been required to deliver some part of ICT capability, often related to word-processing. Consequently, most departments have written individual units that identify the uses of ICT in detail. The recent establishment of discrete ICT lessons in most secondary schools often has not been followed by necessary changes to English schemes of work. Hence, some departments still deliver one unit in each year at Key Stage 3 that focuses on a particular activity, such as the development of a subject website. Few departments have yet tried to map the development of ICT skills systematically across the entire key stage programme.

Even where schemes of work are thorough and integrate ICT throughout, there has usually been too little thought given to issues of progression, either in developing ICT skills or in how ICT contributes to extending literacy. Inevitably, ICT activities in English recur from year to year. The problems arise when pupils in Year 9 are merely repeating activities from earlier years and the teacher is unable to build on the pupils' developing skills, knowledge and understanding in ICT. Pupils are increasingly joining secondary school with significant experience of using computers at home and of direct ICT teaching in their primary school. Heads of departments need to keep the curriculum for ICT under regular review; to work towards consistency across teachers and classes; to seek ways of sharing good practice and developing individual teachers' skills; and to identify the contribution that ICT should make to learning in English as pupils move through the school:

A particular weakness is sometimes found in monitoring and evaluation, which is done well in only a minority of English departments in relation to use of ICT. As a result, curriculum provision for English in ICT remains patchy, with many pupils experiencing vastly different versions of the English curriculum depending on their teachers' skills and enthusiasm for ICT. Another challenge for heads of English departments is to plan their ICT curriculum so that it builds more effectively on what is being taught in discrete ICT lessons.

## **Staff development**

Many English departments have changed significantly from the time of their NOF training. Teachers who received the training have often moved on to other schools while teachers have been appointed who have never received the training. As a result, it becomes harder to evaluate the impact of NOF on teaching and learning. Nevertheless, the impact overall has been uneven and in most schools NOF training has had little lasting impact on the quality of teaching in English. For the majority of teachers, however, the training served to raise the profile of ICT in subjects and gave them the opportunity to extend their personal and keyboard skills.

The NOF-funded training was generally more successful in improving teachers' personal ICT skills than addressing their pedagogical needs in English. Where the training was most effective, departments were trained together and were able to provide mutual support and apply what they had learned to a specific and actual context. For many teachers, the training was not differentiated well enough and teachers who were already competent in the use of ICT gained little that was new. Frequently, the trainers working with a department lacked the subject knowledge to support teachers effectively. Where training was effective, it involved all members of staff who support pupils' literacy, including librarians and teaching assistants.

In some schools, the initial impact of the training was positive but there was too little planned follow-up. This remains a weakness. Too few departments have attempted to identify systematically the continuing professional development needs of all teachers and as a result the subsequent training provided is sometimes random and unplanned. Furthermore, departments have found it difficult to respond to frequent changes in personnel and the degree of shared experience provided by the initial training has lessened over time. Teachers who joined the department after the training were often not able to access supplementary training.

However, overall teachers speak more positively about the training provided since their initial NOF course. This has often been provided by the LEA or in-house and has been more successful because it has been able to build more directly on teachers' existing skills and to develop their pedagogical understanding about the most effective uses of ICT to support their subject needs.

## **Resources and accommodation**

Access to high-quality resources in ICT has steadily improved in English and is now having a positive impact on the quality of work in English in two schools in three. Most English departments have access to large numbers of computers mainly through booking dedicated ICT suites or through using ICT in the library and resource centre. Most suites are well resourced and comfortable but pupils are often expected to share computers. Dedicated ICT rooms are frequently heavily timetabled for discrete ICT lessons; as a consequence, teachers complain that access is limited and they are provided with too little opportunity to develop pupils' skills.

In most schools, English classrooms contain small numbers of individual computers. These are not always well used. Part of the problem is that use of computers in average sized classrooms reduces space and thereby restricts the range of activities possible; this is especially difficult where teachers are keen to develop interactive approaches and wish to make good use of drama or group discussion. Sets of mobile laptops are sometimes available in schools but they are so far little used in English.

In a minority of schools, English departments have access to their own suite of computers or a mini-suite. This tends to happen where departments make particularly effective use of ICT and have therefore been successful in bidding for better resources. This has the effect of further increasing the gap between the best and the least effective departments. Where teachers are keen to use ICT, difficulties in accessing machines can be overcome in creative ways. For instance, in one school in the Midlands where access to computer suites was difficult, teachers were encouraged to send pupils to use computers in other English classrooms. This meant that many members of a class might be working on computers in a number of other English teaching rooms; this was accepted departmental policy and worked well with the full co-operation of all teachers.

*Accommodation for ICT in English also varies in the range of applications and facilities available, with many rooms having no projection facilities or whiteboard for whole-class teaching and others with machines lacking internet access or multi-media. Access to the use of telecommunications has improved. Most school libraries have significantly developed their ICT capability and many pupils use the library computers to access the internet and use other software packages for research. Little use is made by pupils at present of email, with only a minority of departments expanding the range of 'audiences' for pupils' writing in this way or using this facility to exchange drafts of work between school and home, between pupils or between staff and pupils. In most cases, departments have access to a suitable range of software for supporting work in English.*