

Supplementary guidance: the inspection of literacy in schools

Autumn 2017

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- ▲ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities
- ▲ primary schools
- ▲ secondary schools
- ▲ all-age schools
- ▲ special schools
- ▲ pupil referral units
- ▲ independent schools
- ▲ further education
- ▲ independent specialist colleges
- ▲ adult community learning
- ▲ local authority education services for children and young people
- ▲ teacher education and training
- ▲ Welsh for adults
- ▲ work-based learning
- ▲ learning in the justice sector

Estyn also:

- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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What is the purpose?

To provide guidance to inspectors for evaluating literacy in schools

For whom is it intended?

Maintained and independent schools and non-maintained settings

From when should the guidance be used?

September 2017

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Supplementary guidance

The key Estyn documents that guide inspection activity are the inspection guidance handbooks for each sector. However, we also produce supplementary guidance to help inspectors to consider specific aspects of education and training further.

The supplementary guidance documents set out some key principles, considerations and resources for inspectors. They relate to all sectors that Estyn inspects, unless they state that they are for a specific sector. They expand on certain aspects of education/training (e.g. the inspection of literacy) or on ways of conducting inspections (e.g. the use of learning walks) or specific inspection arrangements (e.g. guidance on inspecting church schools).

The supplementary guidance documents do not aim to be comprehensive. Inspectors are not required to work through them exhaustively when covering any specific aspect on an inspection. However, inspectors may find them useful when responding to specific emerging questions that arise during inspections or when they wish to reflect or investigate further.

The supplementary guidance documents may help providers gain an understanding of Estyn's inspection arrangements. They may also be helpful to providers in evaluating specific aspects of their own provision.

Our inspection work is based on the following principles:

- Inspectors will approach inspection with a positive mindset to ensure it is the best possible professional learning experience for the staff in each provider
- Inspectors will take a learner-focused approach to inspection
- Inspectors will always focus strongly on the quality of teaching and learning
- Inspectors will seek out well-considered innovative practice
- Inspectors will tailor the inspection activities according to the circumstances in each provider as far as possible
- Inspectors will be agile and responsive to emerging findings and will use the increased range of inspection tools and approaches available
- Inspectors will consider everything in the inspection framework, but will only report on the key strengths and weaknesses within each provider

Inspecting literacy

The key tasks for inspectors are to judge:

- the standards of pupils' literacy skills
- whether pupils have the literacy skills needed to access the whole curriculum
- how well the whole curriculum develops pupils' literacy skills
- the quality of and leadership in, and management of the co-ordination of provision to develop pupils' literacy skills

Inspectors should report on pupils' literacy skills in every inspection and, where appropriate, report on any outcomes or indicators that relate to these skills.

The following guidance is intended to support inspectors in making judgements and in reporting on standards of literacy and on pupils' ability to use these skills in work across the curriculum. Although the guidance contains information about the school's provision for literacy, inspectors should remember that the main focus should be on the standards achieved by pupils.

Gathering and reviewing inspection evidence

The team will plan the inspection so that they can gather evidence about literacy within the five inspection areas. The Reporting Inspector may already have identified emerging questions about literacy from the review of the pre-inspection information. The team will ensure that they have enough time to review the key evidence they need to make their judgements. The main forms of evidence are:

- samples of pupils' work
- discussions with pupils, staff, leaders, managers, governors, parents and others
- observation of teaching and other activities, including evidence gathered through learning walks
- survey responses from pupils, parents/carers, governors, teaching and support staff
- documentary evidence, including information on pupils' performance and progress
- information from the local authority/regional consortium

The team will use direct observation of pupils' work wherever possible to gather evidence to support their judgements. Inspectors may select an additional sample of pupils' work, if required, to further their investigation in a specific aspect.

Inspectors will undertake a range of activities to gather evidence for their evaluation of pupils' progress and the quality of the school's provision. This may include:

- learning walks, where inspectors move relatively quickly through a number of classes looking at a specific aspect of the school's provision
- conversations with selected pupils about their work

- discussions with individual teachers about pupils' learning in their classes and how they plan work to meet pupils' needs
- longer classroom observations
- scrutiny of the school's tracking of pupils' literacy attainment

The voice of pupils is a key source of evidence for inspectors. Discussions with pupils will provide an opportunity to explore their' knowledge and understanding of their work. It will also help inspectors to gauge how well the school supports pupils and contributes to their progress and wellbeing.

Schools should make information available to the inspection team about the standards achieved by pupils, particularly the results of any initial screening tests and other assessments. This will help inspectors to judge pupils' progress, to come to a view about the standards pupils achieve compared to their starting-points and the way teachers use the information from assessment to inform their planning and their lessons.

The team will need to consider stakeholders' views on the school and test out the validity of those views during the inspection.

During the inspection

IA1 Standards of literacy

Inspectors should report clearly on how well pupils speak, listen, read and write. They should consider to what extent pupils have the literacy skills required to access the whole curriculum and how well the wider curriculum itself develops pupils' speaking, listening reading and writing skills.

Inspectors need to consider how well pupils:

- speak accurately and fluently
- pay appropriate attention to accuracy of syntax and expression and convey experiences, ideas and information clearly, precisely and appropriately
- listen and respond to others (making significant contributions to discussion, communicating clearly, confidently and effectively in a way that suits the subject, audience and purpose)
- use verbal reasoning skills, form independent views and demonstrate effective listening skills by summarising key points, challenging what is heard on the grounds of reason, evidence or argument
- ask questions and think questions through for themselves
- have a depth and breadth of understanding (understanding key concepts and ideas, making connections between different aspects of the work, understanding the big picture)
- apply understanding to wider contexts, for example everyday life or new situations
- locate, select and use information (reading closely for information, selecting, summarising, identifying key points, synthesising information) from a wide range

of written and digital texts

- respond to ideas and information using complex reading skills, verbally and in writing (identifying patterns, making predictions, drawing conclusions, discussing, making comparisons, considering a range of interpretations, inferring intended meaning and evaluating its purpose)
- research answers from a range of sources, consider evidence and its reliability, weigh up pros and cons, cope with the demands of reading and writing tasks/activities
- organise and present ideas and information clearly, effectively and coherently in their writing (planning, proof-reading, editing/revising work)
- write accurately (spelling, punctuation, grammar, vocabulary, matching style to purpose and audience)
- vary sentence structures to engage and sustain the reader's interest
- use a full range of punctuation in order to vary pace, clarify meaning, avoid ambiguity and create deliberate effects
- write at length using a wide range of text types, appropriate to their age and ability
- from different groups respond, for example boys and girls, those from different ability groups and disadvantaged pupils

Sources of evidence include:

- samples of pupils' language, literacy and communication and English work
- samples of pupils' work from other areas of learning and subjects
- learning walks that focus on a specific aspect of literacy work, for example guided reading sessions
- session observations
- analysis of standardised literacy scores and/or reading ages of particular groups
- the progress of pupils on literacy intervention programmes
- analysis of records of pupils' progressive development of their literacy skills

Inspectors should scrutinise samples of work to judge whether pupils' literacy skills are at a level that is appropriate to the task and their ability. They should judge whether pupils are over-reliant on support (for example, writing frameworks, worksheets or too much copying of information), that prevents them from developing independent literacy skills.

During discussions with pupils about their books, inspectors should consider the standards of pupils' speaking skills, for example, whether they are they able to provide clear explanations about their work and whether their vocabulary is appropriate for their age and ability. During learning walks and session observations inspectors should consider whether pupils listen well to adults and to other pupils. For example, whether their responses show that they have listened carefully in paired or group discussion.

Inspectors should use opportunities in session observations and learning walks to evaluate how well pupils apply their reading skills, such as in reading back their writing, reading texts for information and reading information on-screen. Inspectors should be particularly alert to situations where pupils' weak reading skills affect their access to the curriculum and where these skills are a barrier to their progress in

learning across the curriculum. You will need to identify the possible causes for this, including:

- pupils' lack of skills in Welsh or English; and/or
- pupils' inability to transfer skills to a new context (their lack of ability to apply their Welsh or English knowledge and skills).

Inspectors should consider how well pupils' write in all areas of the curriculum and whether they write to the same standard as they do in their work in English or Welsh.

IA2 Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

When considering pupils' wellbeing and attitudes to learning, inspectors should consider:

- how well pupils use their literacy skills to support and enhance their well-being and self-esteem, for example whether they can explain clearly how to keep themselves healthy and safe and whether they can talk about their feelings and emotions
- pupils' attitudes to their literacy work, for example whether they are able to sustain concentration when reading appropriate to their age and ability and how well they persevere with written tasks to refine and improve them

IA3 Teaching and learning experiences

Estyn has no fixed template for the type or structure of lesson required. Teachers should structure the lesson in the way that they consider is most appropriate for the learners in the class and the learning objectives they wish the learners to achieve. The inspector should judge teaching in relation to the success of the learning and the progress made by learners, not on the methods used or the type or style of delivery by the teacher, and in the context of learning over time.

Inspectors involved in conducting learning walks and observing teaching and learning sessions should consider the following guidance when judging the quality of teaching.

Inspectors should consider how well the teaching:

- demonstrates good use of language, which influences the development of pupils' speaking, listening, reading and writing skills
- provides opportunities for discussion, uses probing and open-ended questions to improve pupils' understanding, challenge them to develop their verbal responses and make learning connections
- provides opportunities for pupils to talk through the use of role-play, drama, collaborative group work and debate
- develops pupils' early reading skills through a consistent approach to the teaching of reading strategies including phonics and the teaching of high frequency words
- builds on early reading skills to ensure that pupils develop effective comprehension and information retrieval strategies

- provides meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop and use higher order reading skills such as inference, deduction and synthesis
- encourages positive attitudes to reading
- develops pupils' writing skills. Inspectors should be alert to approaches that inhibit the development of pupils' skills. For example, the overuse of writing frames or unnecessary use of worksheets that limit opportunities for pupils to write independently or at length
- helps pupils to develop planning, drafting and editing skills when writing
- develops pupils' spelling skills
- enables pupils to develop a fluent handwriting style
- helps pupils to organise their writing in an appropriate form, ensuring content is detailed within and between paragraphs or sections, developing and sustaining ideas coherently
- challenges pupils to write effectively for different audiences and purposes and in different forms
- requires pupils to select vocabulary, grammar, form and structural and organisational features thoughtfully to reflect the audience, purpose and context
- provides regular opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in work across the curriculum as well as in English and Welsh lessons
- provides feedback to pupils to help them improve their work

Inspectors should consider how well staff:

- embed literacy skills into meaningful learning experiences across all subjects and areas of learning
- provide opportunities for pupils to participate in a range of trips and visits that enhance the literacy curriculum, for example trips to libraries and theatres
- make good use of visitors to schools to engage pupils with reading and writing, for example children's authors, poets and actors
- use extra-curricular activities to promote and develop pupils' literacy skills, for example drama and writing clubs
- ensure that pupils' skills gained in literacy and English/Welsh lessons are reinforced, enhanced and developed further in other subjects and areas of learning
- adapt work when pupils have literacy skills that are significantly below or above expected levels for their age
- plan for the development of pupils' thinking, planning, creative and problem-solving skills
- plan in the foundation phase to provide a good balance between structured activities for direct teaching of literacy development and active approaches, including play-based learning
- increase progressively the level of challenge in the work.

Inspectors should consider whether:

- the school has a comprehensive literacy policy which is implemented effectively
- the development of literacy skills has an appropriate level of priority in the school improvement plan and in subject plans
- in samples of short term planning, such as lesson plans how well staff exploit

opportunities to develop pupils' literacy skills

- there is a strong emphasis on the development of pupils' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills
- there is coherent provision for the use and application of pupils' developing their literacy skills across the whole curriculum
- there is suitable emphasis on oral work
- opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy skills are matched appropriately to pupils' developing needs and abilities
- there is planning for progression so that pupils are given increasingly challenging literacy tasks
- teaching methods match appropriately to pupils' specific learning needs, for example where pupils have English as an additional language

IA4 Care, support and guidance

Inspectors should evaluate how well the school:

- tracks and monitors pupils' progress in developing their literacy skills as they move through the school, including pupils with additional needs, for example disadvantaged pupils or those with English as an additional language
- uses information obtained from assessment to set clear targets for improvement in literacy for individuals, groups of pupils and the whole-school

Inspectors should consider how well:

- the school uses assessment data to identify the needs of all pupils including those in need of additional support
- intervention programmes make sure that pupils make good progress and catch up with their peers
- information about pupils' skills and progress is shared between staff
- staff adapt teaching and learning strategies for pupils receiving intervention
- information about assessment is used to provide work that is matched well to pupils' literacy needs
- assessment is used to inform decisions about whether pupils remain in support programmes or no longer need intervention work
- the school develops parents' capacity to support their children's literacy development, for example by providing information on the curriculum or workshops for parents that help them to support their children with reading

IA5 Leadership and management

Inspectors may hold discussions with leaders and managers to consider how well they initiate and support effective skills strategies and policies across the range of the school's work.

Inspectors may consider:

- whether the headteacher and senior leaders are well-informed about issues in the teaching and learning of literacy, provide strong leadership and convey high expectations about pupils' achievements

- how well leaders and managers focus on raising standards and if they know how well pupils are progressing, including those receiving targeted support or extension work
- if the school has clear targets for raising standards in literacy, and a realistic plan for achieving them
- how well the English/literacy leaders help other teachers plan literacy work
- how well co-ordinators for other subjects plan opportunities within these subjects to improve pupils' skills in literacy
- how well the school resources the development of pupils' literacy skills, for example, by ensuring that those responsible for coordinating provision have enough time to do so
- how well parents are kept informed about the school's policy for improving standards in literacy and are encouraged to be involved through discussions at school and the regular use of homework.

Inspectors may scrutinise the school's strategic and operational plans and other documentation, which relate to the development of pupils' skills. These include literacy action plans and evaluations of progress and trends in taking this area of provision forward.

Inspectors may consider how well the school has included the monitoring and evaluation of pupils' levels of skills, and their successful development by staff, within its self-evaluation and planning for improvement policies and procedures.

Inspectors may consider the professional training that staff undertake to develop pupils' literacy skills and their own abilities to develop these and how this translates into effective whole-school practice.

To consider when looking at pupils' work

- Do pupils write across the curriculum to the same standards they achieve in English/Welsh lessons?
- Do they write across a range of genres for different purposes and audiences?
- Do they plan, draft and redraft their work effectively?
- Is spelling and punctuation age appropriate?
- Is handwriting and presentation clear?
- Is there evidence of pupils developing their reading skills through tasks based on literal comprehension, locating facts, analysing and synthesising?
- Do pupils use inference and deduction to make hypotheses, summarise and draw conclusions?
- Are learning activities purposeful and do they build successfully on what pupils know?
- Is there clear evidence of differentiation?
- Does feedback help pupils to improve their literacy work skills?

To consider when evaluating literacy intervention programmes

- How does the school identify the pupils who need support to improve their literacy skills?
- Do intervention programmes support the full range of literacy skills including speaking and writing?
- What training do teaching assistants who deliver the intervention programme receive?
- What is the format and frequency of the sessions?
- How effective are intervention strategies in helping pupils catch up with their peers?
- How is the progress of pupils on the intervention programmes communicated to managers and other staff?
- How does the school ensure that classroom teachers are aware of the teaching and learning strategies and the resources used in the intervention programmes? What strategies does the school use to make sure they use similar strategies and resources in their lessons?

Document A: Questions for listening to pupils in the foundation phase
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Reading

Younger pupils

What is your book about?

What is happening in the pictures?

What do you think will happen next?

How will the story end?

What do you do if you do not know a word?

Can you tell me about the difference between a letter, word sentence or paragraph?

Do you know this letter name?

Do you know which sound(s) this letter makes?

Older pupils

What has happened so far in your book? Tell me about your favourite character.

Why do you like this character?

What do you think will happen next? Why?

What is your favourite part of the book and why?

Do you read information books?

Writing

Younger pupils

Do you like writing?

What do you like writing about?

Can you write your name and what you like doing in school if I help you?

What do you do if you cannot spell a word?

Do you sometimes write on the computer?

Older pupils

What type of writing do you like best – writing stories or information writing?

What do you find easy about writing?

What do you find difficult about writing?

Do you sometimes plan your writing? Do you sometimes plan with a friend or in a group?

What do you do if you cannot spell a word?

Tell me how you wrote this story/account etc?

Document B: Questions for listening to pupils in key stage 2 and 3

Reading

What is your book about?

What has happened so far in your book? Tell me about the character/plot...?

What do you think will happen next? How will the story end?

What do you do if you do not know a word?

Do you have a favourite character/part of the book? Why do you like this character?

What does the author mean by the phrase...?

Which words do you think were the most effective to describe x? Why do you think the author chose these?

Do you think x could really happen?

Can you explain what kind of person x is?

How often do you use the library? Can you take books home?

Do you use the internet for research?

Can you show me how to find...in this reference book?

Tell me how you search to find information. What are indexes, contents pages and glossaries used for?

Writing

Do you like writing?

What do you like writing about?

What do you do if you can not spell a word?

Do you use word processing programmes for writing?

What type of writing do you like best – writing stories or information writing?

What do you find easy about writing?

What do you find difficult about writing?

Do you plan your writing? Do you sometimes plan with a friend or in a group?

How do you check your writing?

Tell me how you wrote this story/account etc?

Can you explain why it is important to know who will be reading your writing?

Can you tell me how you would set out a letter/list/invitation/report/story etc?