

Office for
Standards
in Education



Strategies in action

The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies in action: case studies of improving and declining schools

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Introduction

1. We are now in the fourth and fifth years of the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) and the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) which were designed to raise standards in mathematics and English. National test data, section 10 inspections of schools by Ofsted and longitudinal evaluations by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) have all reported improvement in pupils' attainment in both subjects. The majority of primary schools have accepted and followed willingly the advice and guidance given by the two national strategies.

2. HMI have inspected annually a nationally representative sample of 300 schools for each strategy, reducing the sample to 200 schools for the NNS from the start of its second year of implementation. The results of the national curriculum tests for 11 year olds over the last five years show that some schools in Ofsted's two national samples have made much greater progress than others, although only around 3% of the schools in each sample managed to improve their results in either English or mathematics every year since 1998.

3. Twenty-four schools were selected as case studies for this survey of improvement and decline in standards of English and mathematics. The selection took into account the results of the national curriculum tests, the findings of Ofsted section 10 reports, and evidence from the annual inspection visit to each school by HMI in Ofsted's primary education division. Some of the schools were chosen because they had made good progress, others because they had not. HMI visited each school between the summer term 2001 and the spring term 2002. This report identifies the factors that supported improvement and those that held back schools' progress. It includes quotations from HMI and from the headteachers and pupils of some of the schools inspected.

4. The schools ranged in size and type from a small rural school in an isolated part of south-west England to a very large primary school close to a heavy industrial area in the north east. The numbers of pupils attending the schools varied from below 90 to over 500. The proportion of pupils entitled to a free school meal ranged from 5% to more than 65%. One middle school (8–12 years) and two junior schools were included in the survey; the other schools contained the full primary age-range. One school had only recently been removed from the special measures required after a critical section 10 report by Ofsted.

How do schools start to improve standards?

5. As noted in many other studies of effective schools, the influence of the headteacher is a major factor in the improvement schools make.¹ All the headteachers in the schools making good progress provided strong leadership and good management. They were able to establish a culture of improvement by:

- making a convincing case for the need for change, highlighting areas of weakness among groups of pupils and comparing the progress made by each class through detailed analysis of the school's performance
- involving all staff in the process of improvement, frequently asking for their views and holding detailed discussions with them about what needed to be achieved
- committing the school to continuous improvement through the systematic monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning
- having a detailed knowledge of the NLS and NNS, sometimes being able to provide models of good practice from their own teaching
- leading staff through a comprehensive review of pupils' performance to assess exactly where improvements were required
- deciding upon priorities, clarifying the action to be taken, allocating the work and identifying the criteria which would indicate that the work had been successful
- reviewing progress regularly and systematically, sometimes involving governors in this process
- calling upon outside support where and when required.

6. Where leadership was ineffective, this had an adverse effect on the process of improvement, as the following example illustrates:

Leadership in the first year of NLS implementation was weak and poorly focused. At the time of the first visit by HMI in November 1998, the literacy audit had not been completed and the timetable for the in-school programme of NLS training lacked firm dates. By the end of the summer term 1999, one year after the introduction of the strategy, not all the intended training had been completed and no significant monitoring of classroom practice had taken place. Even in the second year of implementation, monitoring had been only

¹ See *Improving city schools*, Ofsted, 2000, and *The curriculum in successful primary schools*, Ofsted, 2002.

informal; observations had not necessarily included the full literacy hour; and there had been no written feedback to the teachers. Data analysis and curricular target-setting were at a very rudimentary stage. The school lacked a clear sense of direction and purpose, particularly in terms of raising standards of writing.

7. Even when specific areas for improvement had been identified, weak leadership meant there was a lack of progress in bringing about change. For example, the headteacher of a four-class primary school, who had been appointed internally from the teaching staff, found it difficult to adapt her relationship with her former colleagues and, consequently, to take the firm action needed to change the school's approach to the teaching of writing:

The headteacher's response to the NLS framework is ambivalent and lacks conviction. She is reluctant to monitor planning and teaching rigorously and is unwilling to act on evidence of poor practice, even when she is sure of her ground. For example, increased time for extended writing was identified as a priority and discussed with HMI on the previous visit, but there has been no change of timetable or practice over 13 months later.

8. By contrast, in a large primary school in the north of England, a more experienced headteacher led by example. She was knowledgeable about the two national strategies and was able to do some teaching each week. She was therefore able to engage in debate as a teacher facing day-to-day issues relating to planning, resources and assessment. She was totally committed to school improvement and, through her own professional development, remained at the forefront of change:

This view is supported by the school adviser who describes the head as 'ahead of the game' and able to link new initiatives through 'joined-up thinking'. Importantly, staff are given non-contact time to improve their subject knowledge and incorporate new ideas into the school's approaches to teaching and learning. As an important part of performance management, the headteacher gives all teachers one full day a term as 'team/phase time' to review and monitor progress and develop new and better ways of working.

9. Not all of the effective headteachers chose to teach one or other of the strategies directly, but they all had a very good knowledge of their content and structure. This contributed to their confidence in taking firm action to solve the problems facing their schools. The most effective headteachers were secure enough to admit to problems, involved others in finding solutions and were resourceful in looking for ways of motivating their colleagues to change and improve their practice.

10. The successful headteachers regarded good planning for improvement as central in achieving a whole-school approach to improvement and in ensuring a shared commitment to agreed goals. This approach was summed up by the headteacher of a rural primary school:

You have to know what you want and how to get there. Then you have to make it happen – money, resources, time. Making things happen. Following them through. There has to be commitment. You have to prepare for ups and downs and support each other through them.

11. In one school, the literacy action plan, which had a strong effect on teaching and learning, was used well to set out clearly the school's expectations and was an effective means of drawing in and making use of new ideas.

The action plan identifies clear targets for improvement in the teaching of literacy. It includes details of additional training which is needed to promote improvements in the teaching of writing. It provides particulars of monitoring, including that undertaken by the governing body, and records precisely defined success criteria as well as the expected improvements in standards. The plan, which is reviewed each term, provides a very good framework for developments in literacy.

Hard choices: facing the truth

12. Effective headteachers are not afraid to make difficult or unpopular decisions. They regard constructive criticism as helpful and act upon it, even when it involves hard choices of the kind described by this headteacher:

Raising achievement had to become the main thrust of this school, starting from a very low baseline. The first area of challenge was teachers' expectations. We needed to move from 'This is all we can expect from these children' to the development of a 'can do' culture. This challenge began with discussion by staff of the Autumn Package and PANDA information, and their realisation that our achievement was well below that of similar schools. This open sharing of information was extremely painful and challenging for staff and had to be carefully managed in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust.

13. A headteacher who was appointed at a time when the NNS had only recently been introduced had a clear plan for bringing about change in the school, and welcomed both national strategies as part of this process: 'The NNS helped to bring about a change of culture in the school'. Changes occurred in several areas, particularly the structure and organisation of lessons in all subjects, both in terms of the content to be taught and the method of teaching. The headteacher persuaded staff to accept the importance of planning.

14. At times, it is necessary for a school's senior management to change direction to achieve the desired ends. One headteacher attempted to introduce the NLS to tackle the relatively poor levels of attainment of her pupils who lived in an affluent, semi-rural area of south-west England. The teachers were very reluctant to change their long-established routines. After a year of limited progress, the head decided to change the emphasis and concentrate upon the full implementation of the NNS, an area where staff felt less certain of their own practice. There were a few crucial changes of staff, and before long, and with the active encouragement of the headteacher, the ideas embedded in the daily mathematics lesson also began to influence the teaching of literacy. After two years, the resistance to more effective ways of working in both subjects was largely overcome. Relationships improved and most staff began to see the value of the new approaches.

15. In some situations, extra support and guidance need to be focused on individual teachers for specific reasons. Where the underachievement of a whole

class is concerned, headteachers must take the necessary action, hard though this may be.

The headteacher and his deputy have carried out a detailed analysis of pupils' progress through examination of the scores achieved in annual tests. The 'before and after' scores from each class were entered onto a spreadsheet and graphs produced of the progress made by different classes. These results showed immediately that pupils in one class were making almost no progress, and a number of them were scoring fewer marks at the end of the test period than at the beginning. The headteacher showed the results to the teacher concerned before discussing all the graphs in a staff meeting. The data provided concrete evidence of at least one teacher who required considerable support and re-training, which soon followed.

Analysing school and pupil performance

16. Until there has been a detailed analysis of performance, it is difficult to raise the expectations of pupils and staff through setting appropriate targets. The most effective headteachers value data from a variety of sources, link the information to give a more complete picture and use it constructively:

Drive, determination and relentless hard work have resulted in the school's success in raising standards to date. The successful meshing of appropriate assessment, detailed analysis, challenging target-setting, relevant training, improved classroom support, improved quality of teaching, and regular monitoring and review have ensured that no aspect of raising achievement in literacy and numeracy has been allowed to go cold.

17. The collection and analysis of data are not always straightforward, however, especially in schools where staff are uncertain or unenthusiastic about their use.

The schools' response to analysing attainment data and setting numerical targets for groups and individual pupils has not been effective. The school has not tracked pupils' progress from year to year or adjusted the end of key stage targets in response to progress made by individual pupils. There is no effective recording system to track progress and levels of attainment from Year 2 to Year 6. Consequently, the headteacher is unable to identify when, and in which classes, pupils fail to make sufficient progress in mathematics. Without the identification of pupils' strengths and weaknesses, curricular target-setting is not clearly focused. Teachers complete record sheets for each class, but they do not set targets for groups or individual pupils based on an analysis of pupils' assessments, nor do they adjust the teaching programme to tackle areas of weakness.

18. A critical section 10 inspection by Ofsted caused one school to review its procedures in detail. Following the unexpected judgement that the school had serious weaknesses, which the headteacher described as 'devastating', in her own words she 'buckled down and figured it out'. Determined to improve the school, she has given much thought to linking target-setting to better assessment:

As well as half-termly 'assess and review' days, teachers now set short tests more regularly to assess progress against identified weaknesses. On the

classroom wall, teachers display group targets related to the work for that week. In addition, every term, for every pupil, teachers assess pieces of work against national curriculum level descriptions and annotate them, as another means of keeping track of individuals' progress. This also enables them to set long-term individual targets to cover identified gaps. At the end of the year, all this information is collated to provide summative assessments in the pupil data-tracking system, leading to predictions of future attainment. This information enables the headteacher to calculate her numerical targets accurately and to raise expectations.

Training and support

19. The successful schools were good at drawing upon a range of support services and training so that staff could gain the knowledge and skills they needed to improve their practice. The key features were:

- accurate identification of a school's strengths and weaknesses, including evaluation of the reasons for poor performance
- training and support that focused on the weaknesses and reasons for poor performance
- the active involvement of the headteacher in the planning and delivery of training
- ensuring that the work of external consultants was based on a thorough knowledge of standards and the quality of teaching in the school
- the encouragement, through training, of lively debate, underpinned by strategic steering of discussion as a basis for agreeing on policies and practice
- involvement, as far as possible, of teaching assistants in school-based training
- ensuring that changed practice resulting from training and support was linked directly to targets for improvement in pupils' learning.

20. LEA consultants have provided valuable support for many schools and have assisted significantly in improving teaching and learning. The majority of them have very good subject knowledge and the ability to demonstrate good teaching in the classroom. However, even the best support can be wasted if schools' needs are not identified correctly and the support is not focused on key weaknesses. Much depends, in this respect, on the degree of co-operation between LEA consultants and other school improvement services, particularly link advisers and inspectors with good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of individual schools.

21. In one school, for example, the LEA consultant contacted the school and offered assistance. However, she failed to carry out an evaluation of the reasons for the school's indifferent performance and made insufficient use of knowledge held by other LEA personnel about the school. She accepted a brief to lead in-service training on topics specified by the school which were not, in fact, directly related to its problems. There was little improvement as a result.

22. By contrast, where outside support and intervention are focused accurately, there can be swift and significant improvement:

After a programme of lesson observations, the co-ordinator pinpointed individual weaknesses and gained a full and accurate picture of mathematics across the school. She identified whole-school weaknesses: oral and mental sessions were not crisp enough; plenary sessions were insufficiently purposeful and pupils found it difficult to tackle and solve word problems. The whole staff attended training led by the LEA consultants on these three issues. They returned enthused and, as a direct result, the quality of teaching improved.

23. An audit of the pupils' responses should be linked closely to subsequent professional development. Probably the most significant move in one school, in the early days of the NNS, was the setting-up of a well-devised system of numerical and curricular target-setting. Helped by the school's link adviser, who was also responsible for assessment within the LEA, the headteacher learned how to analyse test results from national curriculum tests, optional tests and data from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). Together they identified common weaknesses and adapted the NNS programme to give more emphasis to these areas. The headteacher and the mathematics co-ordinator jointly examined the work of all the pupils in each class. The results were used, with data produced by the LEA, to help set the school's numerical targets for the end of Key Stage 2 and to set curricular targets for groups of pupils in each class.

24. The headteacher explained the process as follows:

Analysis of data, linked to observation of teaching, has helped to identify strengths and weaknesses and what needs to be changed. There is a continuous professional discussion amongst staff. The teachers talk daily about the next steps to be taken. They know well before staff meetings what will be considered. They are asked to think about it, bring their expertise, offer advice and ideas.

Classroom observations by the headteacher or the co-ordinator were part of good communication within the staff. The headteacher also invited staff to observe her lessons in order to build trust, openness and professional discussion.

25. The breakthrough for the school came when one teacher invited the headteacher into her class to help solve a specific problem. The teacher was uncertain why her pupils were not making the progress she expected. After several observations, the headteacher observed that, in the main teaching activity, not all the pupils understood what they were being taught when the teacher moved into new areas of work: while some pupils were ready, others were not. The headteacher deployed a qualified teaching assistant to work with half the class while the teacher did some intensive teaching with the rest. The support from the teaching assistant

meant that the teacher was able to match her teaching, as well as the tasks set, more closely to the pupils' needs and their attitudes to mathematics were transformed.

26. A significant factor in one school's improvement was the influence of the LEA's senior literacy consultant, who led several school-based training sessions on pupils' learning and guided writing. To encourage the school's response, the consultant worked with the deputy head and the Year 6 teacher in assessing samples of Year 6 writing, including national curriculum test scripts, to identify strengths and weaknesses, find what had been overlooked and pinpoint what needed to be taught – and learnt – to achieve level 4 or 5. The pupils were also made aware of the criteria to gain level 4 and were able to talk knowledgeably about their achievement and what they needed to do to improve.

27. A professional development day in another school was devoted to discussing the most effective way of promoting improvement and raising teachers' awareness of the weaknesses in pupils' writing. The discussions resulted in a lively debate, with some disagreements, but the outcome was a shared understanding of the best methods to use to improve teaching, and a commitment from teachers to change their practice. Consistent teaching approaches were adopted, striking a good balance between stimulating pupils' interests in writing and securing more accurate and accomplished responses.

28. Several staff meetings focused on the assessment and analysis of pupils' writing, after which targets were introduced for individual pupils and, later, discussed with their parents. Setting targets for pupils and discussing with them how their writing could be improved gave them clear direction about what they needed to do to become better writers.

29. Schools often found that the problems faced by older pupils stemmed from gaps in earlier work. A very large primary school in a disadvantaged area of the north of England examined the quality of writing across the whole primary age-range. It became clear that there were gaps in the older pupils' knowledge and skills. A large proportion of level 2c results in writing at the end of Key Stage 1 prompted the early years team to consider what could be done to improve teaching in the nursery and reception classes. This led to a stronger focus on writing, listening, speaking, writing sentences, oral rehearsal of sentences before writing and the early identification of pupils who might be in danger of underachieving. A published phonics scheme, *Jolly Phonics*, was introduced in the nursery and the assessment of pupils in the early years started to involve sharper awareness of the Stepping Stones in the Foundation Stage and the levels in the national curriculum. Teachers in the early years also developed a better awareness of sex issues, looking particularly at ways to improve some boys' attitudes to writing. This included involving members of the local football club, showing boys the importance of writing in work and everyday living.

30. In the most effective schools, all staff are included in the in-service training programme. One headteacher observed:

It was evident that the teaching assistants had arrived in the school through a variety of routes, for example, individual learning support, behavioural support,

general learning support, additional literacy support. We were keen to develop the teacher/teaching assistant partnership and pursued additional training opportunities to guide support staff in their rapidly developing classroom support role.

Effective teaching: what makes it work?

31. The two strategies have done a great deal to improve the teaching of mathematics and literacy. The two frameworks provide a clear structure for teaching and curriculum continuity. The training and associated publications have improved teachers' understanding of pedagogy. Now that schools are familiar with the content and teaching methods suggested, teachers have begun to adapt their approaches so that they are tailored more precisely to the needs of their pupils.

32. In a former mining village on the banks of the River Severn, the local school implemented the NLS in all the classes, adapting the literacy hour effectively to accommodate a greater emphasis on writing. The HMI summed up the changes the school had made:

At an early stage, guided reading sessions were moved to the afternoons, so that the teachers could concentrate on guided writing in the literacy hour. The school adopted a systematic approach to the teaching of word level work. A synthetic phonics programme, with the emphasis on blending the sounds in words, is taught daily in reception year, starting in the autumn term with a course of seven weeks, when 42 phonemes are taught at a rate of six a week. In the spring term, the reception year teacher teaches a full literacy hour to the whole class, including very good word level work. Phonics continues to be taught consistently throughout Key Stage 1 and into Key Stage 2, where a commercial spelling programme is used. In addition, the school has implemented Additional Learning Support (ALS) successfully in Years 3 and 4 for pupils whose attainment is below the expected level.

33. The school was strongly committed to retaining a broad and balanced curriculum. After three years of implementing the NLS, the teachers were much more efficient and effective in their teaching of English, leaving them more time for the teaching of other subjects.

34. A primary school to the north of Bristol, identified its 'slow-to-start' reception year pupils at the end of the autumn term to make sure that they did not fall behind.

These pupils receive two terms of an intervention programme based on synthetic phonics, working with a nursery nurse for 15 minutes each day for four days a week. The content is structured and sequenced carefully, with graded bridging materials at word and sentence level to ensure that phonics can be practised and applied in reading and writing. The teaching is known as the 'snappy lesson'.

35. In a case study carried out by the school and the LEA, the pupils in this slow-to-start group were, on average, five months ahead of their chronological age in reading and nine months ahead in spelling. The case study concluded that the intervention programme was a powerful tool for allowing pupils to catch up in literacy

before the gap widened. Furthermore, they did not develop the negative emotional and behavioural problems which often affect pupils who make poor progress in learning to read and write.

36. Pupils given such a solid grounding in the basic skills are able to tackle more complex tasks with greater ease as they mature. Some of the most effective work comes from the close study of whole texts.

37. The Year 5/6 teacher in a small Cornish school described how she began by focusing on the requirements for a range of texts in the NLS framework. She considered which objectives could be pursued; finally, she devised a scheme of work which incorporated the objectives for reading and writing and made sure that pupils were reading literature and non-fiction of good quality.

38. One lesson began with the book, *The Magic Ointment*, by Eric Quayle and Michael Foreman. The teacher researched the source material, finding the legends retold in *Popular Romances of the West of England*, collected by Robert Hunt and published in 1881. She showed this source material to the class and discussed it with them. The pupils heard some of the retold legends before writing their own versions. Part of the work involved the consideration of openings of stories. The pupils described how they had looked at 'lots of beginnings' and at each other's work and how this had given them ideas and phrases for their own work.

39. The teacher also asked the class to focus on how authors handle time shifts within a narrative. On one occasion, the class began by studying a variety of texts which used flashbacks, such as *Tom's Midnight Garden*, *Carrie's War*, a short story by Kevin Crossley-Holland and a short extract from *The Snow Spider* by Jenny Nimmo. The teacher emphasised the importance of the pupils having access to the books in the class library, knowing about the author, knowing about other things the authors had written and hearing the stories told. A pupil commented to HMI that it was 'better than having textbooks. We spend a week on the same thing'.

40. When the pupils wrote their own narratives, teaching assistants worked closely with the pupils who needed most support, particularly two boys with statements of special educational needs. After the pupils had written their narratives, they reflected, through structured written evaluations, on how well they had met the objectives of the work. This gave the teacher the opportunity to set clear targets which the pupils could understand, partly because they had gone some way to identifying the targets for themselves. The pupils felt that completing the evaluations was helpful. They said:

We see what we can improve on next time.

We make targets ourselves as well as the teacher.

Looking back on evaluations is helpful. I'm thinking: 'I can do that now'.

Assessment which forms the basis for subsequent action

My teacher is a very good one. He never tells you that you are brilliant if you are only just good! (comment from a Year 5 pupil)

41. All the effective schools were very aware of the importance of detailed and accurate information about what individuals and groups of pupils knew and could do.

42. A northern primary school's assessment system was stated clearly in a comprehensive policy. Although detailed, it was also simple and effective, based firmly on criteria related to the national curriculum levels. It set out end-of-year targets based on national curriculum levels and sub-levels as benchmarks for staff and pupils. Importantly, it was supported by sufficient time to make the system effective, namely half-termly phase meetings and core subject meetings to check, analyse and inform subsequent practice.

43. At the start of each year, every teacher was given a class list that identified levels in each aspect of English for each child; underachieving pupils were identified at this stage. This formed the basis for target-setting. The half-termly, core subject assessments enabled targets to be reviewed by phase groups of staff, supported by the co-ordinator with responsibility for target-setting. Subject co-ordinators also had half-termly meetings to moderate, monitor and sample work. The process was described as follows:

From Year 2 onwards, the pupils are made aware of levels for assessment purposes: for example, how a story assessed as meeting the criteria for level 2C could be improved to meet the criteria for level 2B. Writing is marked and assessed according to criteria for content, style, spelling and punctuation. The work of a child in Year 3, for example, might be judged to be at level 3C for spelling and content but level 3B for punctuation and level 2A for style. This leads to identifying targets for the child such as 'use more sentence starters which avoid the word 'then' or 'use more connectives to link ideas together across sentences'.

44. The school introduced mid-year assessments to give parents details about how their child was progressing in speaking and listening, reading, writing and spelling as well as mathematics, science and homework. This timing encouraged parents to support their child during the year rather than leaving it to the time of summative reports and parents' meetings in the summer term.

45. In another primary school on the outskirts of London, Key Stage 2 teachers set tests linked to published literacy programmes at the end of each unit of work to assess pupils' understanding and to guide planning. They also used the optional tests from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and, in addition, Year 5 and Year 6 pupils tackled previous question papers. Pupils' test results and teachers' assessments were recorded methodically to help teachers to predict outcomes and to focus support more precisely. Teachers set targets for individuals and groups, first trying this as a pilot in Year 1 and Year 6 and then using it successfully throughout the school. Some targets are displayed on the classroom wall, while others are expressed on individual pupils' laminated target sheets, which are referred to constantly. For example, in Year 6, the teacher has a summary of the whole-class targets and those for individual pupils. In marking, he refers to the areas which could be improved, as in these examples:

Story-writing teaching points – whole class:

Describe character's feelings

Include writer's own comments

Make endings sharper

Individual targets – Matthew:

Make sure there are no gaps where you should explain what is happening.

How do characters feel about what is happening?

Use speech marks when someone else is talking.

Use powerful verbs that are interesting.

Your plan needs to have setting, characters, brief description of events in order, and the type of story.

46. In addition, the pupils had lists of the level 4 and level 5 criteria for various aspects of English, 'so that pupils can see the whole picture and be aware of which learning steps they have to climb to achieve a certain level'. Discussion with pupils from these year groups showed that they were fully aware of their targets, as were their parents. A Year 1 pupil said, 'If we don't know something, our teacher writes it down,' and a Year 6 pupil observed, 'I know what I have to do to get level 5'.

Seeing things through: keeping going

47. As HMI have monitored the 600 schools over three to four years, it has become clear that it is not sufficient for schools to generate initial enthusiasm and implement new initiatives. It is just as important to continue to monitor and evaluate the effect on practice once the new ways of working have become established.

48. The section 10 Ofsted inspection of one school judged that it had appropriate achievement because of good teaching, although attainment was below the national average in English and mathematics. Much of the teaching was considered good and the school was well placed to improve still further.

49. Since that inspection, the headteacher has put in place a number of initiatives aimed at bringing about a greater degree of consistency. In the past, for example, although the teachers planned their week's lessons carefully, they did not always focus sufficiently upon specific NLS objectives. The headteacher introduced a method of tracking objectives from long-term planning through to medium-term and weekly planning. Each objective was numbered, thus avoiding repetition in writing plans. Teachers used the numbers in all but the medium-term plans where the objectives were written in full. Monitoring of teaching was linked to this, so that the teaching of objectives could be checked against what was planned. The teachers needed time to get used to this degree of accuracy, but eventually found the process helpful since they had a clearer picture of what had been taught previously.

50. In another primary school, written policies were reviewed every two or three years, starting with a discussion about present practice and how it might be improved. Following this, the teachers implemented what had been agreed. Only when the changes were established was the revised policy formally recorded. The policies were reviewed with all new teachers and teaching assistants, often in full

staff meetings to remind other teachers and help keep everyone on track. The headteacher insisted that the policies influence practice. They were monitored closely through planning, teaching and pupils' work. She expected the same approaches in every class, even down to details such as classroom layout and the storage of resources, so that pupils experienced consistency and knew where to find things.

51. The final few words of one of the HMI case studies provide a useful summary of all that was found:

The concerted efforts of the headteacher through her quiet, purposeful management, and through the teachers' improved and precisely focused teaching, supported by the LEA literacy co-ordinator, have achieved remarkable improvements. The school is a bright and lively place with corridor and classroom displays reflecting the focus on improving standards of literacy. The pupils are proud of their achievements and respond to their teachers' expectations enthusiastically. Most of all, the school has enabled its pupils and staff to achieve way beyond their original expectations.

Conclusion

52. It comes as no surprise that this report finds that good leadership and management are critically important in making the national strategies work. Equally, assessment and the analysis of performance data emerge as key features in the schools that have made a success of the strategies. The schools are able not only to diagnose what individual pupils need to do to improve, but also to translate this information into action at classroom and whole-school level.

53. The analysis of data and the use of assessment also bring other benefits: they force schools and their teachers to face up to their weaknesses, pushing them towards the next step, namely to identify what needs to be done and to look for solutions by focusing on what happens in the classroom. By contrast, the schools which make only limited progress do not make enough use of such information and are consequently unaware of where action is needed.

54. Bringing about improvement often requires a change in the professional culture of the school. Where low standards and weaknesses in teaching are long-standing, it is easy for the schools to assume that improvement is not possible and that attempts are destined to fail. These case studies illustrate that high-quality leadership, allied to the two national strategies, holds the key to higher standards in English and mathematics.

Recommendations

55. Where schools need to raise attainment in English or mathematics, the headteacher and staff should:

- gain a thorough understanding of the principles and detailed workings of the two national strategies

- use data analysis and day-to-day assessment to identify pupils' strengths and weaknesses and ensure that the teaching is matched to their needs
- ensure there is a clear plan of improvement, including numerical and curricular targets, which is understood by all involved
- focus training closely on the needs identified from the evaluation of the quality of teaching and the scrutiny of pupils' work and include all teaching and non-teaching staff in training and development whenever possible
- monitor the effect of initiatives on teaching and learning and evaluate whether the planned changes are making a difference.