



Guidance

Curriculum & Standards

The National
Literacy *Strategy*

Guidance on the organisation of the National Literacy Strategy in Reception classes

**Headteachers &
teachers working
with children in
Reception classes**

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This booklet is for staff working with children in Reception classes. It:

- provides guidance on the way teachers should teach the different elements of the Literacy Hour flexibly throughout the day and appropriately to the age of the children;
- considers progress towards appropriate organisation for Year 1 classes.

The guidance is consistent with the communication, language and literacy elements of the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* and reinforces and expands on Section 4 in the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) *Framework for teaching*, 'Children of Reception Age'. It also clarifies how the NLS *Framework* fits within the context of foundation stage teaching.

Introduction

This guidance is an extension of an earlier paper published in 1998 as additional guidance to the NLS *Framework for teaching*. It places YR literacy teaching in the context of the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* and provides practical advice on planning and organisation.

The importance of appropriate communication, language and literacy learning in the early years cannot be overestimated. Children who enter school with well-developed communication and literacy skills have a considerable advantage over those who have yet to start. Early literacy impacts on the development of thought, feelings and relationships as children are helped to develop confidence, skills and independence with the written word.

Like other important aspects of early learning, learning to be literate is an active process involving play, experimentation and practice. Early literacy teaching and learning activities must capture children's interests, relate to their experiences and enrich their imaginations. But literacy cannot simply be discovered through experience, however richly provided; it has to be taught. Such teaching should be both direct and indirect. For example, what adults do when reading and writing may be invisible to children unless it is carefully modelled, unpacked and made explicit. Children need to experience and enjoy a wide range of stories, rhymes and other forms of written language but they also need to be shown how readers read and writers write. They need opportunities to experiment with reading and writing but they also need to develop early phonemic awareness, to begin learning how the sounds of spoken language are written down and how letters are correctly formed. This requires both carefully planned indirect teaching through play and direct, interactive teaching – teaching that engages children and inducts them into the purposes and conventions of written language.

For these reasons, it is important that the elements of the Literacy Hour are systematically covered in an appropriate way from the start of the Reception year. The guidance that follows gives practical advice on how this can be achieved. On the question of when and how to introduce a daily Literacy Hour, the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* (p.27) reinforces the guidance already provided in the *NLS Framework for teaching*:

Reception teachers may choose to cover the elements of the Literacy Hour ... across the day rather than in a single unit of time. In order to ensure a smooth transition to the Literacy Hour ... in Year 1, both [the Literacy Hour and the daily mathematics lesson] should be in place by the end of the Reception year.

The *Framework for teaching objectives*

- **Context of Reception classes.** Children enter Reception classes at different points throughout the school year. Most children spend some time in Reception class between their fourth and fifth birthdays. Some will spend three full terms in the Reception class. Others will join the class in January or at the start of the summer term.

It follows that some summer-born children will receive only one term of Reception before moving into Year 1 in September. Reception classes support children at different levels of experience and understanding. The children will arrive with experience from a range of settings – nursery classes, pre-schools, playgroups, childminders and direct from their homes. It is important that the communication, language and literacy support for children in Reception takes full account of previous experiences and builds on what children can already do.

- **Intended outcomes – what you should teach towards.** The *NLS Framework for teaching* identifies the range of texts that should be introduced during the Reception year. The word, sentence and text level objectives are carefully selected to support early literacy learning and provide a smooth transition into Year 1. The objectives are not broken down by terms, and teachers select relevant objectives to meet the needs of children and to complement work in other areas of the curriculum.
- **Links to the early learning goals.** The *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* is carefully aligned with the *NLS Framework*. Reception teachers will need to draw on both documents in their planning. The *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* is the core reference document for all early years practitioners and sets out the early learning goals for communication, language and literacy. Reception class teachers should also refer to the guidance set out in the *NLS Framework* when planning for literacy.

- **Examples of what children can do.** At the end of the summer term children should have secured a range of literacy skills, knowledge and understanding. They should:
 - read a range of familiar and common words and simple sentences independently;
 - hear and say initial and final sounds in words and short vowel sounds in words;
 - attempt writing for various purposes using features of different forms such as lists, stories and instructions;
 - write their own names and other things such as labels and captions;
 - begin to form simple sentences sometimes using punctuation;
 - make phonetically plausible attempts at more complex words; and
 - use a pencil and hold it effectively to form recognisable letters – most of which are formed correctly.
- **Planning for Reception classes.** Planning for Reception needs to reflect the different experiences and development levels of children. The very different levels of understanding will require teachers to plan carefully pitched class teaching and group activities. It is important to use such focused group and shared time to support children towards the appropriate whole-class objectives.
- **Meeting the range of need.** Reception teachers monitor the progress of individual children carefully, recognising the diversity of children's needs. It is important to observe progress in early literacy learning in order to support the early identification of differences and difficulties. The *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* includes detailed information which will support the inclusion of all children in planned activities.

Children entering Reception classes speaking English as an additional language or using sign language present further opportunities and challenges for teachers. Practitioners should value linguistic diversity and take every opportunity to support the development of home language skills. Some children may require focused language support. It is important to provide a wealth of opportunities for talk as part of the curriculum and where possible provide support through languages other than English.

- **Parents.** Parents are children's first teachers. Teachers need to work closely with parents in an effective partnership to build on the principles of good literacy provision at home and at school. This partnership will ensure that parents are aware of, and confident about, giving and receiving information and feel part of the school's approach to teaching the children literacy. Teachers should also make available to parents information on the ways in which children are taught to develop skills such as writing, speaking and reading in the Reception class. They should also be prepared to explain the concepts that support children's learning and development.

As children see adults talking and working together they grow to understand that this is the way they are expected to learn. As they watch parents read and respond to booklets and pamphlets written in their home language they become more confident in their own ability to read and write in a range of situations.

Aspects of the Literacy Hour in Reception

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By the end of the Reception year, teachers are expected to have established the Literacy Hour. Almost every aspect of learning in Reception can offer opportunities to support the development of language and literacy. Planning should reflect this. Opportunities for learning both through play and talk, and through more structured activities, are included in the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*. These all contribute in important ways to addressing the early learning goals and the objectives of the NLS *Framework* by the end of the Reception year.

In the Reception class literacy will be taught through whole-class and group activities and through the provision of a wide range of activities to support the teaching and learning of literacy including:

- locating and using written language in the environment of the home, the setting and the local area;
- singing songs and nursery rhymes;
- imaginative play;
- cooking and shopping;
- collaborative games and play;
- listening to stories;
- making books; and
- reading and writing in role play.

Reception teachers are expected to cover the elements of the Literacy Hour but may choose to do so across the day rather than in a single

unit of time. All literacy teaching should be planned and delivered against identified objectives. When learning is supported it should include examples of teachers and other adults demonstrating successful literacy behaviour and pupils actively engaged in a wide range of appropriate activities.

Throughout the Reception year teachers should aim to provide the following entitlement for each child:

- frequent and regular experience of shared reading and shared writing;
- frequent and regular experience of language awareness;
- activities to develop phonemic awareness and phonic knowledge;
- guided reading and guided writing sessions each week; and
- regular opportunities to engage in a range of planned independent learning activities where skills that have been taught in shared and guided work can be experimented with and applied in a variety of contexts including play and outdoor activities.
- **The Literacy Hour in Key Stages 1 and 2.** The daily Literacy Hour at Key Stages 1 and 2 provides a balanced literacy curriculum and ensures that all pupils receive a minimum entitlement of direct literacy teaching.

Teachers organise pupils in a variety of ways to meet their teaching objectives. At times whole-class teaching will be appropriate to deliver shared and interactive reading and writing activities. At other times children will work independently while the teacher supports more focused learning matched to the needs of a small group.

- **Planning and organising for literacy teaching.** When planning and organising for literacy in Reception classes it is important to take into consideration the personal, social and emotional development of children as well as their literacy needs. It is particularly important to use the group and independent phases of the Literacy Hour with care to ensure that children work in a range of groups and settings and enjoy a variety of active learning opportunities appropriately matched to individual children's abilities and interests.
- **Putting the elements together.** The elements of the Literacy Hour are appropriate for all children in Reception classes. Teachers need to make arrangements to ensure that all children are introduced appropriately to the Literacy Hour and have experience of a complete Literacy Hour by the end of the third term of Reception. Using the elements of the Literacy Hour to support teaching will help to promote active shared learning and the development of important independent learning strategies. As children gain experience and maturity, teachers will wish to extend the time spent in shared activities, developing children's social and interactive skills and their focus on collaborative, shared learning.

Role of teaching assistants and other adults

Schools need to plan carefully the role and contribution of teaching assistants (TAs) and other adults in Reception. TAs need to know the teacher's objectives for the children's literacy learning and the targets that may have been set for individuals or groups of children. Assistants can observe, join in children's play, support groups or individuals and provide valuable feedback to the teacher.

During whole-class sessions assistants can:

- focus on particular children and monitor their response to the discussion;
- sit near children who need help, and provide focused, discreet support; and
- help a particular group feed back to the whole group in a plenary session.

During group and independent work assistants can:

- observe and talk with the children to inform planning;
- ask the children questions to support their thinking;
- help them to work together sociably;

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- follow up shared word work by playing word and sound games with small groups;
- introduce and reinforce specific vocabulary;
- revisit objectives introduced by the teacher in shared reading and writing for pupils who need additional support; and
- support discussion as children experiment with and apply their learning.

Conclusion

Children in Reception classes are expected to:

- share and enjoy a rich variety of quality texts;
- have regular and frequent experience of all elements of the Literacy Hour;
- work together as a whole class, in small groups, pairs and independently; and
- experiment with, practise and apply their communication and language learning across a wide range of play and practical activities.

References

<i>Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage</i>	QCA/DfEE 2000
<i>The National Literacy Strategy Framework for teaching</i>	NLS/DfEE 1998

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